SOCIAL ECOLOGY & DEMOCRATIC CONFEDERAL-ISM

A reader from Make Rojava Green Again

in cooperation with the association

of the students from Kurdistan YXK and JXK

2020

makerojavagreenagain.org

www.makerojavagreenagain.org

facebook.com/GreenRojava

twitter.com/GreenRojava

makerojavagreenagain@riseup.net

July 2020

Table of Contents

1 Abdullah Öcalan on the return to social ecology **6**

Abdullah Öcalan

2 What is social ecology? **9**

Murray Bookchin

3 The death of Nature **28**

Carolyn Merchant

4 Ecology in Democratic Confederalism **33**

Ercan Ayboga

5 Reber Apo is a Permaculturalist - Permaculture an Political Transformation in North East Syria **55**

Viyan Qerecox

6 Ecological Catastrophe: Nature Talks Back **59**

Pelşîn Tolhildan

7 Against Green Capitalism **67**

Hêlîn Asî

8 The New Paradigm: Weaving ecology, democracy and gender liberation into a revolutionary political paradigm **70**

Viyan Querecox

1 Abdullah Öcalan on the return to social ecology

By Abdullah Öcalan

Humans gain in value when they understand that animals and plants are only entrusted to them. A social 'consciousness' that lacks ecological consciousness will inevitably corrupt and disintegrate. Just as the system has led the social crisis into chaos, so has the environment begun to send out S.O.S. signals in the form of life-threatening catastrophes. Cancer-like cities, polluted air, the perforated ozone layer, the rapidly accelerating extinction of animal and plant species, the destruction of forests, the pollution of water by waste, piling up mountains of rubbish and unnatural population growth have driven the environment into chaos and insurrection. It's all about maximum profit, regardless of how many cities, people, factories, transportation, synthetic materials, polluted air and water our planet can handle. This negative development is not fate. It is the result of an unbalanced use of science and technology in the hands of power. It would be wrong to hold science and technology responsible for this process. Science and technology in themselves are not to blame. They function according to the forces of the social system. Just as they can destroy nature, they can heal it. The problem is exclusively a social one. There is a great contradiction between the level of science and technology and the standard of living of the overwhelming majority of people. This situation is the result of the interests of a minority that has control over science and technology. In a democratic and free society, however, science and technology will play an ecological role.

Ecology itself is also a science. It examines the relationship of society to its environment. Although it is still a very young science, it will play a leading role in overcoming the contradiction between society and nature together with all other sciences. The environmental consciousness that has already been developed in places will make a revolutionary leap forward through ecology understood in this way. The bond between the communal primitive society and nature is like the bond between child and mother. Nature is understood as something alive. The golden rule of the religion of this time was not to do anything against it in order not to be punished by it. The natural religion is the religion of the communal primitive society. There is no contradiction to nature, no anomaly in the emergence of society. Philosophy itself defines the human being as “nature becoming aware of itself”. The human being is basically the most developed part of nature. This proves the unnaturalness and anomaly of this social system, which puts the most developed part of nature in contradiction to it. The fact that this social system has turned the human, who enthusiastically united himself with nature in feasts, into such a plague for nature shows that it is itself the plague. The holistic nature of the human and the natural environment does not only refer to economic and social issues. It is also an indispensable

philosophical passion to understand nature. This is actually based on reciprocity. Nature proves its great curiosity and creative power by becoming human. The human being, on the other hand, recognizes itself by understanding nature. It is remarkable that the Sumerian word for freedom, “Amargi”, means return to the mother - nature. Between human beings and nature there is a quasi love relationship. This is a great love story. To destroy this love is, religiously speaking, a mortal sin. Because you cannot create a greater sense of meaning than this one. In this context, the remarkable significance of our interpretation of the female bleeding is shown once again. It is both a sign of the distance from nature and of its origin. The woman's naturalness stems from her closeness to nature. This is also the real meaning of her mysterious attraction.

No social system that is not in harmony with nature can claim rationality and morality for itself. Therefore, the system that is most at odds with nature will also be overcome in terms of rationality and morality. As can be seen from this brief definition of the contradiction between the capitalist social system and its present chaotic state and the catastrophic destruction of the environment, it is a dialectical relationship. The fundamental contradiction to nature can only be overcome by turning away from the system. It cannot be solved by environmental protection movements alone. On the other hand, an ecological society also requires a moral change. The amorality of capitalism can only be overcome by an ecological approach. The connection between morality and conscience demands an empathetic and sympathetic spirituality. This in turn only makes sense if it is based on ecological competence. Ecology means friendship with nature, belief in natural religion. In this respect ecology stands for a renewed, conscious and enlightened union into a natural, organic society. Also the practical problems of an ecological way of life are quite topical. One of the tasks of the activists is to expand the many existing organizations in every respect and to make them an integral part of democratic society.

This also includes solidarity with the feminist and liberal women's movements. One of the most important activities in democratization is the promotion and organization of environmental awareness. Just as there once was a pronounced class or national consciousness, we must create an awareness of democracy and the environment through intensive campaigns. Whether we are talking about animal rights, the protection of forests or reforestation, such actions, if carried out properly, are indispensable elements of social actionism. For people who have no feeling for the biological can only have a disturbed social feeling.

Those who perceive the relationship between the two can feel true and with all their senses. Nature, which has so far been plundered and exposed, must and will witness a great struggle to restore its cover of flora and fauna. The forest will have to be given a chance again. "Great patriotism means reforestation and planting trees." This is a valuable slogan.

Those who do not love and protect animals will also not be able to protect and love humans. Man gains value when he understands that animals and plants are only entrusted to him. A social "consciousness" that lacks ecological consciousness will inevitably corrupt and disintegrate, as was seen in real-socialism. Ecological consciousness is a fundamental ideological consciousness. It resembles a bridge between philosophy and morality. A policy that promises salvation from the current crisis can only lead to a real social system if it is ecological. As with the problem of women's freedom, the patriarchal and statist understanding of power also contributes to the fact that ecological problems have been delayed for so long and have still not been solved properly. If ecology and feminism continue to develop, the patriarchal and statist system becomes completely out of balance.

The true struggle for democracy and socialism will only become a complete affair when it takes up the cause of women's freedom and nature's salvation. Only such a complete struggle for a new social system can lead to a meaningful way out of the current chaos.

The text is an excerpt from Abdullah Öcalan's defense pamphlet "Bir Halkı Savunmak" (engl: "Beyond State, Power and Violence".)

2 What is Social Ecology?

By Murray Bookchin

From Social Ecology and Communalism, AK Press, first printing, 2007.

Social ecology is based on the conviction that nearly all of our present ecological problems originate in deep-seated social problems. It follows, from this view, that these ecological problems cannot be understood, let alone solved, without a careful understanding of our existing society and the irrationalities that dominate it. To make this point more concrete: economic, ethnic, cultural, and gender conflicts, among many others, lie at the core of the most serious ecological dislocations we face today — apart, to be sure, from those that are produced by natural catastrophes.

If this approach seems a bit too sociological for those environmentalists who identify the primary ecological problem as being the preservation of wildlife or wilderness, or more broadly as attending to "Gaia" to achieve planetary "oneness," they might wish to consider certain recent developments. The massive oil spills that have occurred over the past two decades, the extensive deforestation of tropical forests and magnificent ancient trees in temperate areas, and vast hydroelectric projects that flood places where people live, to cite only a few problems, are sobering reminders that the real battleground on which the ecological future of the planet will be decided is clearly a social one, particularly between corporate power and the long-range interests of humanity as a whole.

Indeed, to separate ecological problems from social problems – or even to play down or give only token recognition to their crucial relationship – would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. In effect, the way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Unless we clearly recognize this, we will fail to see that the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that so thoroughly permeate society are what has given rise to the very idea of dominating the natural world.Unless we realize that the present market society, structured around the brutally competitive imperative of "grow or die," is a thoroughly impersonal, self-operating mechanism, we will falsely tend to blame other phenomena – such as technology or population growth – for growing environmental dislocations. We will ignore their root causes, such as trade for profit, industrial expansion for its own sake, and the identification of progress with corporate self-interest. In short, we will tend to focus on the symptoms of a grim social pathology rather than on the pathology itself, and our efforts will be directed toward limited goals whose attainment is more cosmetic than curative.

Some critics have recently questioned whether social ecology has treated the issue of spirituality in ecological politics adequately. In fact, social ecology

was among the earliest of contemporary ecologies to call for a sweeping change in existing spiritual values. Indeed, such a change would involve a far-reaching transformation of our prevailing mentality of domination into one of complementarity, one that sees our role in the natural world as creative, supportive, and deeply appreciative of the well-being of nonhuman life. In social ecology a truly natural spirituality, free of mystical regressions, would center on the ability of an emancipated humanity to function as ethical agents for diminishing needless suffering, engaging in ecological restoration, and fostering an aesthetic appreciation of natural evolution in all its fecundity and diversity.

Thus, in its call for a collective effort to change society, social ecology has never eschewed the need for a radically new spirituality or mentality. As early as 1965, the first public statement to advance the ideas of social ecology concluded with the injunction: "The cast of mind that today organizes differences among human and other life-forms along hierarchical lines of 'supremacy' or 'inferiority' will give way to an outlook that deals with diversity in an ecological manner – that is, according to an ethics of complementarity. In such an ethics, human beings would complement nonhuman beings with their own capacities to produce a richer, creative, and developmental whole – not as a "dominant" species, but as a supportive one. Although this ethics, expressed at times as an appeal for the "respiritization of the natural world," recurs throughout the literature of social ecology, it should not be mistaken for a theology that raises a deity above the natural world or even that seeks to discover one within it. The spirituality advanced by social ecology is definitively naturalist (as one would expect, given its relation to ecology itself, which stems from the biological sciences) rather than supernaturalistic or pantheistic areas of speculation.

The effort in some quarters of the ecology movement to prioritize the need to develop a pantheistic "eco-spirituality" over the need to address social factors raises serious questions about their ability to come to grips with reality. At a time when a blind social mechanism – the market – is turning soil into sand, covering fertile land with concrete, poisoning air and water, and producing sweeping climatic and atmospheric changes, we cannot ignore the impact that an aggressive hierarchical and exploitative class society has on the natural world. We must face the fact that economic growth, gender oppression, and ethnic domination – not to speak of corporate, state, and bureaucratic incursions on human well-being – are much more capable of shaping the future of the natural world than are privatistic forms of spiritual self-redemption. These forms of domination must be confronted by collective action and by major social movements that challenge the social sources of the ecological crisis, not simply by personalistic forms of consumption and investment that often go under the oxymoronic rubric of "green capitalism." The present highly co-optative society is only too eager to find new means of commercial aggrandizement and to add ecological verbiage to its advertising and customer relations efforts.

Nature and society

To escape from this profit-oriented image of ecology, let us begin with some basics – namely, by asking what society and the natural world actually are. Among the many definitions of nature that have been formulated over time, the one that has the most affinity with social ecology is rather elusive and often difficult to grasp because understanding and articulating it requires a certain way of thinking – one that stands at odds with what is popularly called "linear thinking." This "nonlinear" or organic way of thinking is developmental rather than analytical, or in more technical terms, it is dialectical rather than instrumental. It conceives the natural world as a developmental process, rather than the beautiful vistas we see from a mountaintop or images fixed on the backs of picture postcards. Such vistas and images of nonhuman nature are basically static and immobile. As we gaze over a landscape, to be sure, our attention may momentarily be arrested by the soaring flight of a hawk, or the bolting leap of a deer, or the low-slung shadowy lope of a coyote. But what we are really witnessing in such cases is the mere kinetics of physical motion, caught in the frame of an essentially static image of the scene before our eyes. Such static images deceive us into believing in the "eternality" of single moments in nature.

But nonhuman nature is more than a scenic view, and as we examine it with some care, we begin to sense that it is basically an evolving and unfolding phenomenon, a richly fecund, even dramatic development that is forever changing. I mean to define nonhuman nature precisely as an evolving process, as the totality, in fact, of its evolution. Nature, so concerned, encompasses the development from the inorganic into the organic, and from the less differentiated and relatively limited world of unicellular organisms into that of multi-cellular ones equipped with simple, then complex, and in time fairly intelligent neural apparatuses that allow them to make innovative choices. Finally, the acquisition of warm-bloodedness gives to organisms the astonishing flexibility to exist in the most demanding climatic environments.

This vast drama of nonhuman nature is in every respect stunning and wondrous. Its evolution is marked by increasing subjectivity and flexibility and by increasing differentiation that makes an organism more adaptable to new environmental challenges and opportunities and that better equips living beings (specifically human beings) to alter their environment to meet their own needs rather than merely adapt to environmental changes. One may speculate that the potentiality of matter itself – the ceaseless interactivity of atoms in forming new chemical combinations to produce ever more complex molecules, amino acids, proteins, and under suitable conditions, elementary life-forms – is inherent in inorganic nature. Or one may decide quite matter-of-factly that the "struggle for existence" or the "survival of the fittest" explains why increasingly subjective and more flexible beings are capable of addressing environmental change more effectively than are less subjective and flexible beings. But the simple fact remains that these evolutionary dramas did occur, indeed the evidence is carved in stone in the fossil record. That

nonhuman nature is this record, this history, this developmental or evolutionary process, is a very sobering fact that cannot be ignored without ignoring reality itself.

Conceiving nonhuman nature as its own interactive evolution rather than as a mere scenic vista has profound implications – ethical as well as biological – for ecologically minded people. Human beings embody, at least potentially, attributes of nonhuman development that place them squarely within organic evolution. They are not "natural aliens," to use Neil Evernden's phrase, strong exotics, phylogenetic deformities that, owing to their tool-making capacities, "cannot evolve with an ecosystem anywhere." Nor are they "intelligent fleas," to use the language of Gaian theorists who believe that the earth ("Gaia") is one living organism. These untenable disjunctions between humanity and the evolutionary process are as superficial as they are potentially misanthropic. Humans are highly intelligent, indeed, very self-conscious primates, which is to say that they have emerged – not diverged – from a long evolution of vertebrate life-forms into mammalian and finally primate life-forms. They are a product of a significant evolutionary trend toward intellectuality, self-awareness, will, intentionality, and expressiveness, be it in verbal or in body language.

Human beings belong to a natural continuum, no less than their primate ancestors and mammals in general. To depict them as "aliens" that have no place or pedigree in natural evolution, or to see them essentially as an infestation that parasitizes the planet the way fleas parasitize dogs and cats, is not only bad ecology but bad thinking. Lacking any sense of process, this kind of thinking – regrettably so commonplace among ethicists – radically divides the nonhuman from the human. Indeed, to the degree environmental thinkers romanticize nonhuman nature as wilderness and see it as more authentically "natural" than the works of humans, they freeze nonhuman nature as a circumscribed domain in which human innovation, foresight, and creativity have no place and offer no possibilities.

The truth is that human beings not only belong in nature, they are products of a long, natural evolutionary process. Their seemingly "unnatural" activities – like the development of technology and science, the formation of mutable social institutions, highly symbolic forms of communication and aesthetic sensibilities, and the creation of towns and cities – all would have been impossible without the large array of physical human attributes that have been aeons in the making, be they the large human brain or the bipedal motion that frees human hands for making tools and carrying food. In many respects, human traits are enlargements of nonhuman traits that have been evolving over the ages. Increasing care for the young, cooperation, the substitution of mentally guided behavior for largely instinctive behavior – all are present more keenly in human behavior. Among humans, as opposed to nonhuman beings, these traits are developed sufficiently to reach a degree of elaboration and integration that yields cultures, comprising institutions of families, bands, tribes, hierarchies, economic classes, and the state – in short,

highly mutable societies for which there is no precedent in the nonhuman world, unless the genetically programmed behavior of insects is to be regarded as social. In fact, the emergence and development of human society has been a continual process of shedding instinctive behavioral traits and of clearing a new terrain for potentially rational behavior.

Human beings always remain rooted in their biological evolutionary history, which we may call "first nature," but they produce a characteristically human social nature of their own, which we may call "second nature." Far from being unnatural, human second nature is eminently a creation of organic evolution's first nature. To write second nature out of nature as a whole, or indeed to minimize it, is to ignore the creativity of natural evolution itself and to view it one-sidedly. If "true" evolution embodies itself simply in creatures like grizzly bears, wolves, and whales – generally, animals that people find aesthetically pleasing or relatively intelligent – then human beings are de-natured. Such views, whether they see human beings as "aliens" or as "fleas," essentially place them outside the self-organizing thrust of natural evolution toward increasing subjectivity and flexibility. The more enthusiastic proponents of this de-naturing of humanity may see human beings as existing apart from nonhuman evolution, as a "freaking," as Paul Shepherd put it, of the evolutionary process. Others simply avoid the problem of clarifying humanity's unique place in natural evolution by promiscuously putting human beings on a par with beetles in terms of their "intrinsic worth." The "either/or" propositional thinking that produces such obfuscations either separates the social from the organic altogether or flippantly makes it disappear into the organic, resulting in an inexplicable dualism at one extreme or a naïve reductionism at the other. The dualistic approach, with its quasi-theological premise that the world was "made" for human use, is saddled with the name anthropocentrism, while the reductionist approach, with its almost meaningless notion of a "biocentric democracy," is saddled with the name biocentrism.

The bifucation of the human from the nonhuman reflects a failure to think organically or to approach evolutionary phenomena with an evolutionary way of thought. Needless to say, if nature were no more than a scenic vista, then mere metaphoric and poetic descriptions of it might suffice to replace systematic thinking about it. But nature is the history of nature, an evolutionary process that is going on to one degree or another under our very eyes, and as such, we dishonor it by thinking of it in anything but a processual way. That is to say, we require a way of thinking that recognizes that "what is," as it seems to lie before our eyes, is always developing in "what is not," that it is engaged in a continual self-organizing process in which past and present, along a richly differentiated but shared continuum, give rise to a new potentiality for an ever-richer degree of wholeness. Life, clearly in its human form, become open-endedly innovative and transcends its relatively narrow capacity to adapt only to a pregiven set of environmental conditions. As V. Gordon Childe once put it, "Man makes himself; he is not preset to survive by his genetic makeup."

By the same token, a processual, organic, and dialectical way of thinking has little difficulty in locating and explaining the emergence of the social out of the biological, of second nature out of first nature. It seems more fashionable these days to deal with ecologically significant social issues like an accountant. Thus, one simply juxtaposes two lists of cultural facts – one labeled "old paradigm" and the other, "new paradigm," – as though they were columns of debits and credits. Obviously distasteful items like centralization are listed under "old paradigm," while more appealing ones like decentralization are regarded as "new paradigm." The result is an inventory of bumper-sticker slogans whose "bottom line" is patently absolute good versus absolute evil. All of this may be deliciously synoptic and easy on the eyes, but it is singularly lacking as food for the brain. To truly know and be able to give interpretive meaning to the social issues and ideas so arranged, we should want to know how each one derived from the other and what its part is in an overall development. What, in fact, is meant by "decentralization," and how, in the history of human society, does it derive from or give rise to centralization? Again, we need processual thinking to comprehend processual realities, if we are to gain some sense of direction – practical as well as theoretical – in addressing our ecological problems.

Social ecology seems to stand alone, at present, in calling for an organic, developmental way of thinking out problems that are basically organic and developmental in character. The very definition of the natural world as a development (albeit not anyone) indicates the need for organic thinking, as does the derivation of human from nonhuman nature – a derivation from which we can draw far-reaching conclusions for the development of an ecological ethics that in turn can provide serious guidelines for the solution of our ecological problems.

Social ecology calls upon us to see that the natural world and the social are interlinked by evolution into one nature that consists of two differentiations: first or biotic nature, and second or social nature. Social nature and biotic nature share an evolutionary potential for greater subjectivity and flexibility. Second nature is the way in which human beings, as flexible, highly intelligent primates, inhabit and alter the natural world. That is to say, people create an environment that is most suitable for their mode of existence. In this respect, second nature is no different from the environment that every animal, depending upon its abilities, partially creates as well as primarily adapts to – the biophysical circumstances or ecocommunity in which it must live. In principle, on this very simple level, human beings are doing nothing that differs from the survival activities of nonhuman beings, be it building beaver dams or digging gopher holes.

But the environmental changes that human beings produce are profoundly different from those produced by nonhuman beings. Humans act upon their environments with considerable technical foresight, however lacking that foresight may be in ecological ideals. Animals adapt to the world around them; human beings innovate through thought and social labor. For better or

worse, they alter the natural world to meet their needs and desires – not because they are perverse, but because they have evolved quite naturally over the ages to do so. Their cultures are rich in knowledge, experience, cooperation, and conceptual intellectuality; however, they have been sharply divided against themselves at many points of their development, through conflicts between groups, classes, nation-states, and even city-states. Nonhuman beings generally live in ecological niches, their behavior guided primarily by instinctive drives and conditioned reflexes. Human societies are "bonded" together by institutions that change radically over centuries. Nonhuman communities are notable for their general fixity, by their clearly preset, often genetically imprinted rhythms. Human communities are generally tied together by genetically rooted instinctive factors – to the extent that these communities exist at all.

Hence, human beings, emerging from an organic evolutionary process, initiate, by the sheer force of their biological and survival needs, a social evolutionary development that clearly involves their organic evolutionary process. Owing to their naturally endowed intelligence, powers of communication, capacity for institutional organization, and relative freedom from instinctive behavior, they refashion their environment – as do nonhuman beings – to the full extent that their biological equipment allows. This equipment makes it possible for them to engage not only in social life but in social development. It is not so much that human beings, in principle, behave differently from animals or are inherently more problematical in a strictly ecological sense, as it is that the social development by which they grade out of their biological development often becomes more problematical for themselves and nonhuman life. How these problems emerge, the ideologies they produce, the extent to which they contribute to biotic evolution or abort it, and the damage they inflict on the planet as a whole lie at the very heart of the modern ecological crisis. Second nature as it exists today, far from marking the fulfillment of human potentialities, is riddled by contradictions, antagonisms, and conflicting interests that have distorted humanity's unique capacities for development. Its future prospects encompass both the danger of tearing down the biosphere and alas, given the struggle to achieve an ecological society, the capacity to provide an entirely new ecological dispensation.

Social hierarchy and domination

How, then, did the social emerge from the biological? We have good reason to believe that as biological facts such as kin lineage, gender distinctions, and age differences were slowly institutionalized, their uniquely social dimension was initially quite egalitarian. Later this development acquired an oppressive hierarchical and then an exploitative class form. The lineage or blood tie in early prehistory obviously formed the organic basis of the family. Indeed, it joined together groups of families into bands, clans, and tribes, through either intermarriage or fictive forms of descent, thereby forming the earliest social horizon of our ancestors. More than in other mammals, the simple biological

facts of human reproduction and the protracted maternal care of the human infant tended to knit siblings together and produced a strong sense of solidarity and group inwardness. Men, women, and their children were socialized by means of a fairly stable family life, based on mutual obligation and an expressed affinity that was often sanctified by initiation ceremonies and marital vows of one kind or another.

Human beings who were outside the family and all its elaborations into bands, clans, tribes, and the like, were regarded as "strangers" who could alternatively be welcomed hospitably or enslaved or put to death. What mores existed were based on unreflective customs that seemed to have been inherited from time immemorial. What we call morality began as the rules or commandments of a deity or various deities, in that moral beliefs required some kind of supernatural or mystical reinforcement or sanctification to be accepted by a community. Only later, beginning with the Greeks, did ethics emerge, based on rational discourse and reflection. The shift from blind custom to a commanding morality and finally to a rational ethics occurred with the rise of cities and urban cosmopolitanism, although by no means did custom and morality diminish in importance. Humanity, gradually disengaging its social organization from the biological facts of blood ties, began to admit the "stranger" and increasingly recognize itself as a shared community of human beings (and ultimately a community of citizens) rather than an ethnic folk or group of kinsmen.

In this primordial and socially formative world, other human biological traits were also reworked from the strictly natural to the social. One of these was the fact of age and its distinctions. In social groups among early humans, the absence of a written language helped to confer on the elderly a high degree of status, for it was they who possessed the traditional wisdom of the community, including knowledge of the traditional kinship lines that prescribed marital ties in obedience to extensive incest taboos as well as survival techniques that had to be acquired by both the young and the mature members of the group. In addition, the biological fact of gender distinctions was slowly reworked along social lines into what were initially complimentary sororal and fraternal groups. Women formed their own customs, belief systems, and values, while men formed their own hunting and warrior groups with their own behavioral characteristics, mores, and ideologies.

From everything we know about the socialization of the biological facts of kinship, age, and gender groups – their elaboration into early institutions – there is no reason to doubt that these groups existed initially in complementary relationships with one another. Each, in effect, needed the others to form a relatively stable whole. No one group "dominated" the other or tried to privilege itself in the normal course of things. Yet even as the biological underpinnings of consociation were, over time, further reworked into social institutions, so the social institutions were slowly reworked, at various periods and in various degrees, into hierarchical structures based on

command and obedience. I speak here of a historical trend, in no way predetermined by any mystical force or deity, and one that was often a very limited development among many preliterate or aboriginal cultures and even in certain fairly elaborate civilizations.

Hierarchy in its earliest forms was probably not marked by the harsh qualities it has acquired over history. Elders, at the very beginnings of gerontocracy, were not only respected for their wisdom but were often beloved of the young, with affection that was often reciprocated in kind. We can probably account for the increasing harshness of later gerontocracies by supposing that the elderly, burdened by their failing physical powers and dependent upon their community's goodwill, were more vulnerable to abandonment in periods of material want than any other part of the population. "Even in simple food-gathering cultures," observed anthropologist Paul Radin, "individuals above fifty, let us say, apparently arrogate to themselves certain powers and privileges which benefited themselves specifically, and were not necessarily, if at all, dictated by considerations either of the rights of others or the welfare of the community. In any case, that gerontocracy was probably the earliest form of hierarchy is corroborated by its existence in communities as disparate as the Australian Aborigines, tribal societies in East Africa, and Native communities in the Americas. Many tribal councils throughout the world were really councils of elders, an institution that never completely disappeared (as the word alderman suggests), even after they were overlaid by warrior societies, chiefdoms, and kingships.

Patricentricity, in which masculine values, institutions, and forms of behavior prevail over feminine ones, seems to have developed in the wake of gerontocracy. Initially, the emergence of patricentricity may have been a useful adjunct to a life deeply rooted in the primordial natural world; preliterate and early aboriginal societies were essentially small domestic communities in which the authentic center of material life was the home, not the "men's house" so widely present in later, more elaborate tribal societies. Male rule, if such it can strictly be called, takes on its harshest and most coercive form in patriarchy, an institution in which the eldest male of an extended family or clan has a life-and-death command over all other members of the group. Women may be ordered whom to marry, but they are by no means the exclusive or even the principal object of patriarchy's domination. Sons, like daughters, may be ordered how to behave at the patriarch's command or be killed at his whim.

So far as patricentricity is concerned, however, the authority and prerogative of the male are the product of a long, often subtly negotiated development in which the male fraternity edges out the female sorority by virtue of the former's growing "civil" responsibilities. Increasing population, marauding bands of outsiders whose migrations may be induced by drought or other unfavorable conditions, and vendettas of one kind or another, to cite common causes of hostility or war, create a new "civil" sphere side by side with woman's domestic sphere, and the former gradually encroaches upon the

latter. With the appearance of cattle-drawn plow agriculture, the male, who is the "master of the beasts," begins to invade the horticultural sphere of woman, whose primacy as the food cultivator and food gatherer gives her cultural preeminence. Warrior societies and chiefdoms carry the momentum of male dominance to the level of a new material and cultural dispensation. Male dominance becomes extremely active and ultimately yields a world in which male elites dominate not only women but also, in the form of classes, other men.

The causes of the emergence of hierarchy are transparent enough: the infirmities of age, increasing population numbers, natural disasters, technological changes that privileged activities of hunting and animal husbandry over horticultural responsibilities, the growth of civil society, and the spread of warfare, all served to enhance the male's standing at the expense of the female's. It must be emphasized that hierarchical domination, however coercive it may be, is not the same thing as class exploitation. As I wrote in The Ecology of Freedom, hierarchy must be viewed as institutionalized relationships, relationships that living beings literally institute or create but which are neither ruthlessly fixed by instinct on the one hand nor idiosyncratic on the other. By this, I mean that they must comprise a clearly social structure of coercive and privileged ranks that exist apart from the idiosyncratic individuals who seem to be dominant within a given community, a hierarchy that is guided by a social logic that goes beyond individual interactions or inborn patterns of behavior. They are not reducible to strictly economic relationships based on the exploitation of labor. In fact, many chiefs earn their prestige, so essential to their authority, by disposing of gifts, and even by a considerable disaccumulation of their personal goods. The respect accorded to many chiefs is earned, not by hoarding surpluses as a source of power but by disposing of them as evidence of generosity.

By contrast, classes tend to operate along different lines. In class societies power is usually gained by the acquisition of wealth, not by its disposal; rulership is guaranteed by outright physical coercion, not simply by persuasion; and the state is the ultimate guarantor of authority. That hierarchy is historically more entrenched than class can perhaps be verified by the fact that despite sweeping changes in class societies, even of an economically egalitarian kind, women have still been dominated beings for millennia. By the same token, the abolition of class rule and economic exploitation offers no guarantee whatever that elaborate hierarchies and systems of domination will also disappear.

In nonhierarchical societies, certain customs guide human behavior along basically decent lines. Of primary importance among early customs was the principle of the irreducible minimum (to use Paul Radin's expression), the shared notion that all members of the same community are entitled to the means of life, irrespective of the amount of work they perform. To deny anyone food, shelter, and the basic means of life because of their infirmities or

even their frivolous behavior would have been seen as a heinous denial of the very fight to live. Nor were the basic resources needed to sustain the community ever permitted to be privately owned; overriding individualistic control was the broader principle of usufruct – the notion that the means of life that were not being used by one group could be used, as needed, by another. Thus unused land, orchards, and even tools and weapons, if left idle, were often at the disposition of anyone in the community who needed them. Lastly, custom fostered the practice of mutual aid, the rather sensible cooperative sharing of things and labor, so that an individual or family in straitened circumstances could expect to be helped by others. Taken as whole, these customs became so sedimented into organic society that they persisted long after hierarchy became oppressive and class society became predominant.

The idea of dominating nature

Nature, in the sense of the biotic environment from which humans take the simple things they need for survival, often has no meaning to preliterate peoples as a general concept. Immersed in it as they are, even celebrating animistic rituals in an environment they view as a nexus of life, often imputing their own social institutions to the behavior of nonhuman species, as in the case of beaver "lodges" and human-like spirits, the concept of "nature" as such eludes them. Words that express our conventional notions of nature are not easy to find, if they exist at all, in the languages of aboriginal peoples.

With the rise of hierarchy and domination, however, the seeds were planted for the belief that first nature not only exists as a world that is increasingly distinguishable from the community but one that is hierarchically organized and can be dominated by human beings. The worldview of magic reveals this shift clearly. Here nature was not conceived as a world apart; rather, a practitioner of magic essentially pleaded with the "chief spirit" of a game animal (itself a puzzling figure in the dream world) to coax it in the direction of the arrow or a spear. Later, magic became almost entirely instrumental; the hunter used magical techniques to "coerce" the game to become prey. While the earliest forms of magic may be regarded as the practices of a generally nonhierarchical and egalitarian community, the later kinds of animistic beliefs betray a more or less hierarchical view of the natural world and of latent human powers of domination over reality.

We must emphasize here that the idea of dominating nature has its primary source in the domination of human by human and in the structuring of the natural world into a hierarchical chain of being (a static conception, incidentally, that has no relationship to the dynamic evolution of life into increasingly advanced forms of subjectivity and flexibility). The biblical injunction that gave command of the living world to Adam and Noah was above all an expression of a social dispensation. Its idea of dominating nature – so essential to the view of the nonhuman world as an object of domination – can be overcome only through the creation of a society without those class

and hierarchical structures that make for rule and obedience in private as well as public life, and the objectifications of reality as mere materials for exploitation. That this revolutionary dispensation would involve changes in attitudes and values should go without saying. But new ecological attitudes and values will remain vaporous if they are not given substance and solidity through real and objective institutions (the structures by which humans concretely interact with each other) and through the tangible realities of everyday life from child-rearing to work and play. Until human beings cease to live in societies that are structured around hierarchies as well as economic classes, we shall never be free of domination, however much we try to dispel it with rituals, incantations, ecotheolgies, and the adoption of seemingly "natural" lifeways.

The idea of dominating nature has a history that is almost as old as that of hierarchy itself. Already in the Gilgamesh epic of Mesopotamia, a drama whose written form dates back some four thousand years, the hero defies the deities and cuts down their sacred trees in his quest for immortality. The Odyssey is a vast travelogue of the Greek warrior, more canny than heroic, who in his wanderings essentially subdues the nature deities that the Hellenic world had inherited from its less well-known precursors (ironically, the dark pre-Olympian world that has been revived by purveyors of eco-mysticism and spiritualism). Long before the emergence of modern science, "linear" rationality, and "industrial society" (to cite causal factors that are invoked so flippantly in the modern ecology movement), hierarchical and class societies laid waste too much of the Mediterranean basin as well as the hillsides of China, beginning a vast remaking and often despoliation of the planet.

To be sure, human second nature, in inflicting harm on first nature, created no Garden of Eden. More often than not, it despoiled much that was beautiful, creative, and dynamic in the biotic world, just as it ravaged human life itself in murderous warfare, genocide, and acts of heartless oppression. Social ecology maintains that the future of human life goes hand in hand with the future of the nonhuman world, yet it does not overlook the fact that the harm that hierarchical and class society inflicted on the natural world was more than matched by the harm it inflicted on much of humanity.

However troubling the ills produced by second nature, the customs of the irreducible minimum, usufruct, and mutual aid cannot be ignored in any account of anthropology or history. These customs persisted well into historical times and surfaced sometimes explosively in massive popular uprisings, from revolts in ancient Sumer to the present time. Many of those revolts demanded the recovery of caring and communistic values, at times when these were coming under the onslaught of elitist and class oppression. Indeed, despite the armies that roamed the landscape of warring areas, the tax-gatherers who plundered ordinary village peoples, and the daily abuses that overseers inflicted on peasants and workers, community life still persisted and retained many of the cherished values of a more egalitarian past. Neither ancient despots nor feudal lords could fully obliterate them in peasant villages

and in the towns with independent craft associations. In Ancient Greece, a rational philosophy that rejected the encumbering of thought and political life by extravagant wants, as well as a religion based on austerity, tended to scale down needs and delimit human appetites for material goods. Together they served to slow the pace of technological innovation sufficiently that when new means of production were developed, they could be sensitively integrated into a balanced society. In medieval times, markets were still modest, usually local affairs, in which guilds exercised strict control over prices, competition, and the quality of the goods produced by their members.

"Grow or die"

But just as hierarchies and class structure had acquired momentum and permeated much of society, so too the market began to acquire a life of its own and extended its reach beyond a few limited regions into the depths of vast continents. Where exchange had once been primarily a means to provide for essential needs, limited by guilds or by moral and religious restrictions, long-distance trade subverted those limits. Not only did trade place a high premium on techniques for increasing production; it also became the progenitor of new needs, many of them wholly artificial, and gave a tremendous impetus to consumption and the growth of capital. First in northern Italy and the European lowlands, and later – and most decisively – in England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the production of goods exclusively for sale and profit (the production of the capitalistic commodity) rapidly swept aside all cultural and social barriers to market growth.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the new industrial capitalist class, with its factory system and commitment to limitless expansion, had embarked on its colonization of the entire world, including most aspects of personal life. Unlike the feudal nobility, with its cherished lands and castles, the bourgeoisie had no home but the marketplace and its bank vaults. As a class, it turned more and more of the world into a domain of factories. In the ancient and medieval worlds, entrepreneurs had normally invested profits in land and lived like country gentry, given the prejudices of the times against “ill-gotten” gains from trade. But the industrial capitalists of the modern world spawned a bitterly competitive marketplace that placed a high premium on industrial expansion and the commercial power it conferred, functioning as though growth were an end in itself.

In social ecology it is crucially important to recognize that industrial growth did not and does not result from changes in cultural outlook alone – least of all from the impact of scientific and technological rationality on society. Growth occurs above all from harshly objective factors churned up by the expansion of the market itself, factors that are largely impervious to moral considerations and efforts at ethical persuasion. Indeed, despite the close association between capitalist development and technological innovation, the most driving imperative of any enterprise in the harshly capitalist

marketplace, given the savagely dehumanizing competition that prevails there, is the need of an enterprise to grow in order to avoid perishing at the hands of its savage rivals. Important as even greed may be as a motivating force, sheer survival requires that the entrepreneur must expand his or her productive apparatus in order to remain ahead of others. Each capitalist, in short, must try to devour his or her rivals – or else be devoured by them. The key to this law of life – to survival – is expansion, and the quest for ever-greater profits, to be invested, in turn, in still further expansion. Indeed, the notion of progress, once regarded as faith in the evolution of greater human cooperation and care, is now identified with ever greater competition and reckless economic growth.

The effort by many well-intentioned ecology theorists and their admirers to reduce the ecological crisis to a cultural crisis rather than a social one becomes very obfuscatory and misleading. However ecologically well-meaning an entrepreneur may be, the harsh fact is that his or her very survival in the marketplace precludes the development of a meaningful ecological orientation. The adoption of ecologically sound practices places a morally concerned entrepreneur at a striking and indeed fatal disadvantage in a competitive relationship with a rival – who, operating without ecological guidelines and moral constraints, produces cheap commodities at lower costs and reaps higher profits for further capital expansion. The marketplace has its own law of survival: only the most unscrupulous can rise to the top of that competitive struggle.

Indeed, to the extent that environmental movements and ideologies merely moralize about the wickedness of our anti-ecological society and call for changes in personal lifestyles and attitudes, they obscure the need for concerted social action and tend to deflect the struggle for far-reaching social change. Meanwhile, corporations are skillfully manipulating this popular desire for personal ecologically sound practices by cultivating ecological mirages. Mercedes-Benz, for example, declaims in a two-page magazine advertisement, decorated with a bison painting from a Paleolithic cave wall, that “we must work to make progress more environmentally sustainable by including environmental themes in the planning of new products. Such messages are commonplace in Germany, one of western Europe's worst polluters. Such advertising is equally manipulative in the United States, where leading polluters piously declare that for them, “every day is Earth Day.”

The point social ecology emphasizes is not that moral and spiritual persuasion and renewal are meaningless or unnecessary; they are necessary and can be educational. But modern capitalism is structurally amoral and hence impervious to moral appeals. The modern marketplace is driven by imperatives of its own, irrespective of what kind of CEO sits in a corporation's driver's seat or holds on to its handlebars. The direction it follows depends not upon ethical prescriptions and personal inclinations but upon objective laws of profit or loss, growth or death, eat or be eaten, and

the like. The maxim "Business is business" explicitly tells us that ethical, religious, psychological, and emotional factors have virtually no place in the predatory world of production, profit, and growth. It is grossly misleading to think that we can divest this harsh, indeed mechanistic world of its objective characteristics by means of ethical appeals.

A society based on the law of "grow or die" as its all-pervasive imperative must of necessity have a devastating impact on first nature. Nor does "growth" here refer to population growth; the current wisdom of population-boomers to the contrary, the most serious disruptors of ecological cycles are found in the large industrial centers of the world, which are not only poisoning water and air but producing the greenhouse gases that threaten to melt the ice caps and flood vast areas of the planet. Suppose we could somehow cut the world's population in half: would growth and the despoliation of the earth be reduced at all? Capital would insist that it was "indispensable" to own two or three of every appliance, motor vehicle, or electronic gadget, where one would more than suffice if not be too many. In addition, the military would continue to demand ever more lethal instruments of death and devastation, of which new models would be provided annually.

Nor would "softer" technologies, if produced by a grow-or-die market, fail to be used for destructive capitalistic ends. Two centuries ago, large forested areas in England were hacked into fuel for iron forges with axes that had not changed appreciably since the Bronze Age, and ordinary sails guided ships laden with commodities to all parts of the world well into the nineteenth century. Indeed, much of the United States was cleared of its forests, wildlife, and aboriginal inhabitants with tools and weapons that could have easily been recognized, however much they were modified, by Renaissance people centuries earlier. What modern technics did was accelerate a process that had been well under way at the close of the Middle Ages. It cannot be held solely responsible for endeavors that were under way for centuries; it essentially abetted damage caused by the ever-expanding market system, whose roots, in turn, lay in one of history's most fundamental social transformations: the elaboration of a system of production and distribution based on exchange rather than complementarity and mutual aid.

An ecological society

Social ecology is an appeal not only for moral regeneration but, and above all, for social reconstruction along ecological lines. It emphasizes that, taken by itself, an ethical appeal to the powers that be, based on blind market forces and ruthless competition, is certain to be futile. Indeed, taken by itself, such an appeal obscures the real power relationships that prevail today by making the attainment of an ecological society seem merely a matter of changing individual attitudes, spiritual renewal, or quasi-religious redemption.

Although always mindful of the importance of a new ethical outlook, social ecology seeks to redress the ecological abuses that the prevailing society has

inflicted on the natural world by going to the structural as well as the subjective sources of notions like the domination of first nature. That is, it challenges the entire system of domination itself – its economy, its misuse of technics, its administrative apparatus, its degradations of political life, its destruction of the city as a center of cultural development, indeed the entire panoply of its moral hypocrisies and defiling of the human spirit – and seeks to eliminate the hierarchical and class edifices that have imposed themselves on humanity and defined the relationship between nonhuman and human nature. It advances an ethics of complementarity in which human beings play a supportive role in perpetuating the integrity of the biosphere – the potentiality of human beings to be the most conscious products of natural evolution. Indeed, humans have an ethical responsibility to function creatively in the unfolding of that evolution. Social ecology thus stresses the need to embody its ethics of complementarity in palpable social institutions that will make human beings conscious ethical agents in promoting the well-being of themselves and the nonhuman world. It seeks the enrichment of the evolutionary process by the diversification of life-forms and the application of reason to a wondrous remaking of the planet along ecological lines. Notwithstanding most romantic views, "Mother Nature" does not necessarily "know best." To oppose activities of the corporate world does not require one to become naively biocentric. Indeed by the same token, to applaud humanity's potential for foresight, rationality, and technological achievement does not make one anthropocentric. The loose usage of such buzzwords, so commonplace in the ecology movement today, must be brought to a definitive end by reflective discussion, not by deprecating denunciations.

Social ecology, in effect, recognizes that – like it or not – the future of life on this planet pivots on the future of society. It contends that evolution, both in first nature and in second, is not yet complete. Nor are the two realms so separated from each other that we must choose one or the other – either natural evolution, with its "biocentric" halo, or social evolution, as we have known it up to now, with its "anthropocentric" halo – as the basis for a creative biosphere. We must go beyond both the natural and the social toward a new synthesis that contains the best of both. Such a synthesis must transcend both first and second nature in the form of a creative, self-conscious, and therefore "free nature," in which human beings intervene in natural evolution with their best capacities – their ethical sense, their unequaled capacity for conceptual thought, and their remarkable powers and range of communication.

But such a goal remains mere rhetoric unless a movement gives it logistical and social tangibility. How are we to organize such a movement? Logistically, "free nature" is unattainable without the decentralization of cities into confederally united communities sensitively tailored to the natural areas in which they are located. Ecotechnologies, and of solar, wind, methane, and other renewable sources of energy; organic forms of agriculture; and the design of humanly scaled, versatile industrial installations to meet the regional needs of confederated municipalities – all must be brought into the

service of an ecologically sound world based on an ethics of complementarity. It means too, an emphasis not only on recycling but on the production of high- quality goods that can, in many cases, last for generations. It means the replacement of needlessly insensate labor with creative work and an emphasis on artful craftspersonship in preference to mechanized production. It meas the free time to be artful and to fully engage in public affairs. One would hope that the sheer availability of goods, the mechanization of production, and the freedom to choose one's material lifestyle would sooner or later influence people to practice moderation in all aspects of life as a response to the consumerism promoted by the capitalist market.

But no ethics or vision of an ecological society, however inspired, can be meaningful unless it is embodied in a living politics. By politics, I do not mean the statecraft practiced by what we call politicians – namely, representatives elected or selected to manage public affairs and formulate policies as guidelines for social life. To social ecology, politics means what it meant in the democratic polis of classical Athens some two thousand years ago: direct democracy, the formulation of policies by directly democratic popular assemblies, and the administration of those policies by mandated coordinators who can easily be recalled if they fail to abide by the decision of the assembly's citizens. I am very mindful that Athenian politics, even in its most democratic periods, was marred by the existence of slavery and patriarchy, and by the exclusion of the stranger from public life. In this respect, to be sure, it differed very little from most of the other ancient Mediterranean civilizations – and certainly ancient Asian ones – of the time. What made Athenian politics unique, however, was that it produced institutions that were extraordinarily democratic – even directly so – by comparison with the republican institutions of the so-called "democracies" of today's world. Either directly or indirectly, the Athenian democracy inspired later, more all-encompassing direct democracies, such as many medieval European towns, the little-known Parisian "sections" (or neighborhood assemblies) of 1793 that propelled the French Revolution in a highly radical direction, and more indirectly, New England town meetings, and the other, more recent attempts at civic self-governance.

Any self-managed community, however, that tries to live in isolation and develop self-sufficiency risks the danger of becoming parochial, even racist. Hence the need to extend the ecological politics of a direct democracy into confederations of ecocommunities, and to foster a healthy interdependence, rather than an introverted, stultifying independence. Social ecology would be obliged to embody its ethics in a politics of libertarian municipalism, in which municipalities conjointly gain rights to self-governance through networks of confederal councils, to which towns and cities would be expected to send their mandated, recallable delegates to adjust differences. All decisions would have to be ratified by a majority of the popular assemblies of the confederated town and cities. This institutional process could be initiated in the neighborhoods of giant cities as well as in networks of small towns. In fact, the formation of numerous "town halls" has already repeatedly been proposed

in cities as large as New York and Paris, only to be defeated by well-organized elitist groups that sought to centralize power rather than allow its decentralization.

Power will always belong to elite and commanding strata if it is not institutionalized in face-to-face democracies, among people who are fully empowered as social beings to make decisions in new communal assemblies. Attempts to empower people in this manner and form constitute an abiding challenge to the nation- state – that is, a dual power in which the free municipality exists in open tension with the nation-state. Power that does not belong to the people invariably belongs to the state and the exploitative interests it represents. Which is not to say that diversity is not a desideratum; to the contrary, it is the source of cultural creativity. Still it never should be celebrated in a nationalistic sense of "apartness" from the general interests of humanity as a whole, or else it will regress into the parochialism of folkdom and tribalism.

Should the full reality of citizenship in all its discursiveness and political vitality begin to wane, its disappearance would mark an unprecedented loss in human development. Citizenship, in the classical sense of the term, which involved a lifelong, ethically oriented education in the art of participation in public affairs (not the empty form of national legitimation that it so often consists of today), would disappear. Its loss would mean the atrophying of a communal life beyond the limits of the family, the waning of a civic sensibility to the point of the shriveled ego, the complete replacement of the public arena with the private world and with private pursuits. The failure of a rational, socially committed ecology movement would yield a mechanized, aesthetically arid, and administered society, composed of vacuous egos at best and totalitarian automata at worst. Before the planet was rendered physically uninhabitable, there would be few humans who would be able to inhabit it.

Alternatively, a truly ecological society would open the vista of a "free nature" with a sophisticated eco- technology based on solar, wind, and water; carefully treated fossil fuels would be sited to produce power to meet rationally conceived needs. Production would occur entirely for use, not for profit, and the distribution of goods would occur entirely to meet human needs based on norms established by citizens' assemblies and confederations of assemblies. Decisions by the community would be made according to direct, face-to-face procedures with all the coordinative judgments mandated by delegates. These judgments, in turn, would be referred back for discussion, approval, modification, or rejection by the assembly of assemblies (or Commune of communes) as a whole, reflecting the wishes of the fully assembled majority. We cannot tell how much technology will be expanded a few decades from now; let alone a few generations. Its growth and the prospects it is likely to open over the course of this century alone are too dazzling even for the most imaginative utopian to envision. If nothing else, we have been swept into a permanent technological and communications revolution whose culmination it is impossible to foresee. This amassing of

power and knowledge opens two radically opposing prospects: either humanity will truly destroy itself and its habitat, or it will create a garden, a fruitful and benign world that not even the most fanciful utopian, Charles Fourier, could have imagined.

It is fitting that such dire alternatives should appear now and in such extreme forms. Unless social ecology – with its naturalistic outlook, its developmental interpretations of natural and social phenomena, its emphasis on discipline with freedom and responsibility with imagination – can be brought to the service of such historic ends, humanity may well prove to be incapable of changing the world. We cannot defer the need to deal with these prospects indefinitely: either a movement will arise that will bestir humanity into action, or the last great chance in history for the complete emancipation of humanity will perish in unrestrained self-destruction.

3 The Death of Nature

By Carolyn Merchant

Excerpt from the book „The Death of Nature“

The world we have lost was organic. From the obscure origins of our species, human beings have lived in daily, immediate, organic relation with the natural order for their sustenance. In 1500, the daily interaction with nature was still structured for most Europeans, as it was for other peoples, by close-knit, cooperative, organic communities.

Thus it is not surprising that for sixteenth-century Europeans the root metaphor binding together the self; society, and the cosmos was that of an organism. As a projection of the way people experienced daily life, organismic theory emphasized interdependence among the parts of the human body, subordination of individual to communal purposes in family, community, and state, and vital life permeating the cosmos to the lowliest stone.

The idea of nature as a living organism had philosophical antecedents in ancient systems of thought, variations of which formed the prevailing ideological framework of the sixteenth century. The organismic metaphor, however, was immensely flexible and adaptable to varying contexts, depending on which of its presuppositions was emphasized. A spectrum of philosophical and political possibilities existed, all of which could be subsumed under the general rubric of organic.

Central to the organic theory was the identification of nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provided for the needs of mankind in an ordered, planned universe. But another opposing image of nature as female was also prevalent: wild and uncontrollable nature that could render violence, storms, droughts, and general chaos. Both were identified with the female sex and were projections of human perceptions onto the external world. The metaphor of the earth as a nurturing mother was gradually to vanish as a dominant image as the Scientific Revolution proceeded to mechanize and to rationalize the world view. The second image, nature as disorder, called forth an important modern idea, that of power over nature. Two new ideas, those of mechanism and of the domination and mastery of nature, became core concepts of the modern world. An organically oriented mentality in which female principles played an important role was undermined and replaced by a mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitative manner. As Western culture became increasingly mechanized in the 1600s, the female earth and virgin earth spirit were subdued by the machine. The change in controlling imagery, was directly related to changes in human attitudes and behavior toward the earth. Whereas the nurturing earth image can be viewed as a

cultural constraint restricting the types of socially and morally sanctioned human actions allowable with respect to the earth, the new images of mastery and domination functioned as cultural sanctions for the denudation of nature. Society needed these new images as it continued the processes of commercialism and industrialization, which depended on activities directly altering the earth-mining, drainage, deforestation, and assarting (grubbing up stumps to clear fields). The new activities utilized new technologies-lift and force pumps, cranes, windmills, geared wheels, flap valves, chains, pistons, treadmills, under- and overshot watermills, fulling mills, flywheels, bellows, excavators, bucket chains, rollers, geared and wheeled bridges, cranks, elaborate block and tackle systems, worm, spur, crown, and lantern gears, cams and eccentrics, ratchets, wrenches, presses, and screws in magnificent variation and combination.

These technological and commercial changes did not take place quickly; they developed gradually over the ancient and medieval eras, as did the accompanying environmental deterioration. Slowly over many centuries early Mediterranean and Greek civilization had mined and quarried the mountainsides, altered the forested landscape, and overgrazed the hills. Nevertheless, technologies were low level, people considered themselves parts of a finite cosmos, and animism and fertility cults that treated nature as sacred were numerous. Roman civilization was more pragmatic, secular, and commercial and its environmental impact more intense. Yet Roman writers such as Ovid, Seneca, Pliny, and the Stoic philosophers openly deplored mining as an abuse of their mother, the earth. With the disintegration of feudalism and the expansion of Europe into new worlds and markets, commercial society began to have accelerated impact on the natural environment. By the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the tension between technological development in the world of action and the controlling organic images in the world of the mind had become too great. The old structures were incompatible with the new activities.

Both the nurturing and domination metaphors had existed in philosophy, religion, and literature. The idea of dominion over the earth existed in Greek philosophy and Christian religion; that of the nurturing earth, in Greek and other pagan philosophies. But, as the economy became modernized and the Scientific Revolution proceeded, the dominion metaphor spread beyond the religious sphere and assumed ascendancy in the social and political spheres as well. These two competing images and their normative associations can be found in sixteenth-century literature, art, philosophy, and science.

The image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings. One does not readily slay a mother, dig into her entrails for gold or mutilate her body, although commercial mining would soon require that. As long as the earth was considered to be alive and sensitive, it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it. For most traditional cultures, minerals and metals ripened in the uterus of the Earth

Mother, mines were compared to her vagina, and metallurgy was the human hastening of the birth of the living metal in the artificial womb of the furnace—an abortion of the metal's natural growth cycle before its time. Miners offered propitiation to the deities of the soil and subterranean world, performed ceremonial sacrifices, and observed strict cleanliness, sexual abstinence, and fasting before violating the sacredness of the living earth by sinking a mine. Smiths assumed an awesome responsibility in precipitating the metal's birth through smelting, fusing, and beating it with hammer and anvil; they were often accorded the status of shaman in tribal rituals and their tools were thought to hold special powers.

The Renaissance image of the nurturing earth still carried with it subtle ethical controls and restraints. Such imagery found in a culture's literature can play a normative role within the culture. Controlling images operate as ethical restraints or as ethical sanctions-as subtle "oughts" or "ought-nots". Thus as the descriptive metaphors and images of nature change, a behavioral restraint can be changed into a sanction. Such a change in the image and description of nature was occurring during the course of the Scientific Revolution.

The mechanical order (page 276 – 278)

The fundamental social and intellectual problem for the seventeenth century was the problem of order. The perception of disorder, so important to the Baconian doctrine of dominion over nature, was also crucial to the rise of mechanism as a rational antidote to the disintegration of the organic cosmos. The new mechanical philosophy of the mid-seventeenth century achieved a reunification of the cosmos, society, and the self in terms of a new metaphor-the machine. Developed by the French thinkers Mersenne, Gassendi, and Descartes in the 1620s and 1630s and elaborated by a group of English emigrés to Paris in the 1640s and 1650s, the new mechanical theories emphasized and reinforced elements in human experience developing slowly since the late Middle Ages, but accelerating in the sixteenth century.

New forms of order and power provided a remedy for the disorder perceived to be spreading throughout culture. In the organic world, order meant the function of each part within the larger whole, as determined by its nature, while power was diffused from the top downward through the social or cosmic hierarchies. In the mechanical world, order was redefined to mean the predictable behavior of each part within a rationally determined system of laws, while power derived from active and immediate intervention in a secularized world. Order and power together constituted control. Rational control over nature, society, and the self was achieved by redefining reality itself through the new machine metaphor.

As the unifying model for science and society, the machine has permeated and reconstructed human consciousness so totally that today we scarcely question its validity. Nature, society, and the human body are composed of

interchangeable atomized parts that can be repaired or replaced from outside. The "technological fix" mends an ecological malfunction, new human beings replace the old to maintain the smooth functioning of industry and bureaucracy, and interventionist medicine exchanges a fresh heart for a worn-out, diseased one.

The mechanical view of nature now taught in most Western schools is accepted without question as our everyday, common sense reality—matter is made up of atoms, colors occur by the reflection of light waves of differing lengths, bodies obey the law of inertia, and the sun is in the center of our solar system. None of this was common sense to our seventeenth-century counterparts. The replacement of the older, "natural" ways of thinking by a new and "unnatural" form of life—seeing, thinking, and behaving—did not occur without struggle. The submergence of the organism by the machine engaged the best minds of the times during a period fraught with anxiety, confusion, and instability in both the intellectual and social spheres.

The removal of animistic, organic assumptions about the cosmos constituted the death of nature—the most far-reaching effect of the Scientific Revolution. Because nature was now viewed as a system of dead, inert particles moved by external, rather than inherent forces, the mechanical framework itself could legitimate the manipulation of nature. Moreover, as a conceptual framework, the mechanical order had associated with it a framework of values based on power, fully compatible with the directions taken by commercial capitalism.

The mechanistic view of nature, developed by the seventeenth-century natural philosophers and based on a Western mathematical tradition going back to Plato, is still dominant in science today. This view assumes that nature can be divided into parts and that the parts can be rearranged to create other species of being. "Facts" or information bits can be extracted from the environmental context and rearranged according to a set of rules based on logical and mathematical operations. The results can then be tested and verified by resubmitting them to nature, the ultimate judge of their validity. Mathematical formalism provides the criterion for rationality and certainty, nature the criterion for empirical validity and acceptance or rejection of the theory.

The work of historians and philosophers of science notwithstanding, it is widely assumed by the scientific community that modern science is objective, value-free, and context-free knowledge of the external world. To the extent to which the sciences can be reduced to this mechanistic mathematical model, the more legitimate they become as sciences. Thus the reductionist hierarchy of the validity of the sciences first proposed in the nineteenth century by French positivist philosopher August Comte is still widely assumed by intellectuals, the most mathematical and highly theoretical sciences occupying the most revered position. The mechanistic approach to nature is as fundamental to the twentieth-century revolution in physics as it was to classical Newtonian science, culminating in the nineteenth-century unification

of mechanics, thermodynamics, and electromagnetic theory. Twentieth-century physics still views the world in terms of fundamental particles—electrons, protons, neutrons, mesons, muons, pions, taus, thetas, sigmas, pis, and so on. The search for the ultimate unifying particle, the quark, continues to engage the efforts of the best theoretical physicists.

Mathematical formalism isolates the elements of a given quantum mechanical problem, places them in a lattice like matrix, and rearranges them through a mathematical function called an operator. Systems theory extracts possibly relevant information bits from the environmental context and stores them in a computer memory for later use. But since it cannot store an infinite number of "facts," it must select a finite number of potentially relevant pieces of data according to a theory or set of rules governing the selection process. For any given solution, this mechanistic approach very likely excludes some potentially relevant factors.

Systems theorists claim for themselves a holistic outlook, because they believe that they are taking into account the ways in which all the parts in a given system affect the whole. Yet the formalism of the calculus of probabilities excludes the possibility of mathematizing the gestalt—that is, the ways in which each part at any given instant take their meaning from the whole. The more open, adaptive, organic, and complex the system, the less successful is the formalism. It is most successful when applied to closed, artificial, precisely defined, relatively simple systems. Mechanistic assumptions about nature push us increasingly in the direction of artificial environments, mechanized control over more and more aspects of human life, and a loss of the quality of life itself.

4 Ecology in Democratic Confederalism

by Ercan Ayboga

Ecology discussions and practices in the Kurdish Freedom Struggle with a focus on North Kurdistan (Bakur) Mesopotamia Ecology Movement, www.mezopotamyaekoloji.org

Ecology is one of the three pillars of the paradigm of Democratic Confederalism, the political-theoretical concept of the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Besides democracy and gender liberation, ecology has been mentioned explicitly as a dimension in this concept since 2005. However to date, ecology is less discussed and practiced than the two other pillars.

Ecological Destruction and Exploitation in Kurdistan

With the widespread introduction of capitalism to Kurdistan in the 1950s came a systemic and destructive exploitation of nature. The four colonialist states -Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria – started to plan large energy, mining, agriculture, infrastructure and other investment projects whose implementation led to exceedingly grave ecological destruction and exploitation.[1] This is caused, amongst other factors, by the capitalist economic model, respectively low ecological and social standards in the implementation of the many projects as well as by the simple fact that Kurdistan has the de facto status of a quartered colony. While keeping the colonial status, the hegemonial states introduced step by step, using economic as well as military measures, capitalist relations into the societies of Kurdistan. In the 1970s the construction of numerous large projects – particularly dams, oil-drilling and mining – had been realized through the exercise of the hegemonic power of the highly centralized states in the four parts of Kurdistan under the pretext of progress. After the first preparation work in the 1960s, agriculture started to be industrialized in the 1970s, particularly in West Kurdistan (Rojava) and North Kurdistan (Bakur), later in South (Başur) and East Kurdistan (Rojhilat).

One result of these policies was that communal and solidarity-based relations became weaker in the society of Kurdistan. The infrastructure projects and investments were designed and implemented with absolutely no consultation of the local population and through an authoritarian approach, were in the interest of the colonialist states and the colonialist and collaborative Kurdish upper classes and aimed a profit maximization through capitalist modernization, oppression and a deepening assimilation. While this development was still slow in the 1950s and 1960s, it took on a accelerating

character in the 1970s. As a result of the implementation of large infrastructure projects in rural areas and the consequent displacement of hundreds of thousands; the industrialization of agriculture; the continuous economically-driven migration of rural people; rapid urbanization; industrialisation; and the colonialist wars against the population as from the 1980s; society has lost for a big part its characteristics of solidarity and communality. The main characteristics of the pre-capitalist societies were communalist approach and solidarity on decision-making, economy, sociality, culture and others issues, but different intensity of feudal and conservative forms were also present. Since the 1990s, the number of implemented large projects, as well as the livelihoods of people and economic relations, experienced grave changes. The surviving elements of the subsistence economy and local circles of economy were marginalised and Kurdistan became fully part of the "national market" of each state and entered the neo-liberal global market.

The former times were certainly full of hierarchy, patriarchy and discrimination, but the transition to capitalism was a brutal break in the social and historical development and in a certain way it has even deepened societal sexism and patriarchy. To understand what has been diminished in these decades, the following approaches and characteristics of communalism and solidarity were eroded between the 1950s and 1990s. Typically:

- Although usually not inclusive concerning sex and age, many villages had in practice a kind of assembly of mostly older men and sometimes of some older women which gathered if necessary and took decisions.

- Solidarity on economical issues was common. For example, when a family or a household wanted to build a new house, the whole (or most) of the village joined the construction for at least several days which were crucial to building work proceeding significantly.

- It was usual that the animals of all households have been grazed together in appropriate locations. This was managed in turn by all households.

- When a household had a bad year of harvest, the others in the village supported the affected family by supplying them with the basic foods.

- When a household lacked yeast for cooking bread or milk, the neighbors shared it without hesitation or any discussion. In the following days the supported household put the same amount in the front of the house whose family gave the support.

- When a household had a large harvest of a certain product (like walnut), it was often the practice to share some of the surplus with others in and around the village.

- Solidarity on social affairs was also common. For example, when one or two parents of a family died or were forced to migrate in search of work, then the others in the village took care of the children who could not support themselves.

- There was cultural solidarity. In the evenings often people gathered in one of the houses and shared stories, myths, poems and songs among each other.

Kurdistan belongs worldwide to the countries where until recently capitalist modernity [2] was weak and solidarity and communal structures in the societies were still existing in a significant way. Today the older generations of Kurdistan remember quite well how life was until the 1960s or 1970s.

There is no objective to romanticize the life several decades ago, but nevertheless there was a significant solidarity and sharing in the society and not everything was valued monetarily; life and commodification [3] was not materialized as it is the case today.

Start of Discussion on Ecology

After two decades of freedom struggle in North Kurdistan, in the 1990s the Kurdish Freedom Movement (KFM) started to discuss the ecological question on a Kurdish and global level. The discussion took place against the background of the systematic destruction in Bakur through the Turkish State's war on Kurds; more than 2,5 million displaced people were confronted in a brutal way with the urban and capitalistic life while Turkish state forces destroyed up to 4000 villages and torched huge forested areas in Bakur. The majority of the displaced people had been living before in a mainly subsistence economy with regional product circulation and limited ecological damage. Particularly between 1992 and 1995 large areas were depopulated and many cities in Bakur often doubled their population without being prepared in any way and without support from the Turkish government or others.

In the 1990s especially the political leader Abdullah Öcalan of the Kurdish Freedom Movement (KFM) questioned the emergence of neo-liberal capitalism, with new analyses in general and notably in relation to neo-liberalism's impacts on nature. Particularly the concept of growth, and the increasing disconnection of profit from production has been criticized in Öcalan's writings and speeches. In this sense, he is speaking against the growing number of large investment projects because of the huge and irreparable destruction of nature they cause. Here he included also the climate change which, among others, he considered as an acceleration of ecological destruction by capitalism. To destroy nature for the interest of central governments and profit of companies means usually to destroy the basis of life of millions. The massive ecological destruction affects seriously

human life. Often large projects displace a large number of people and/or exploit the land and surrounding areas which they are forced to leave. Öcalan also discussed the disconnection of people to nature and what kind of impacts this could have on people's minds and the relation of people to each other. In a fundamental way the alienation of people has been put in relation to the disconnection of people from nature. At this point Öcalan connects the discussion on ecology with institutionalized hierarchy which has its roots in patriarchy.

But ecology had not found a place at the core of the ongoing discussions in the 1990s. It was new, not yet theoretically strongly developed and in the shadow of the ongoing brutal war of the Turkish state. The central theoretical discussion at that time focused on highly important topic of women´s liberation. At that time, it was most urgent for the Kurds to discuss the liberation of women as it was the main tool for overcoming conservative and hierarchical structures in society. However an important part of the revolutionaries and political activists within the KFM took note of the discussion on ecology of the 1990s. It influenced in the following years the minds of thousands of politically engaged and interested people. Öcalan's discussion showed a strategic approach as it was a discussion which was ahead of the times in comparison with all other left(ist)-democratic groups and movements in Kurdistan and Turkey. Öcalan was rather at the same level with some global discussions and movements which had started to discuss the ecological contradiction.

Municipalities in Bakur – Challenge to Develop an Ecological Practice

Shortly after Öcalan has been kidnapped through an international plot under the co-ordination of the USA and delivered to the Turkish state in 1999, the armed struggle of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) stopped, and a new and broad discussion on means and perspectives of the freedom struggle started while giving priority to the political-civil struggle. The aim to set up a "Kurdish state" has been given up finally. In the same year in the local elections several important municipalities had been won by HADEP, the People's Democracy Party, the legal party of the KFM at that time. The gained municipalities – among them Amed (Diyarbakir), Batman and Wan (Van) – became essential elements of the freedom struggle of the Kurds. This coincided with decreasing repressive conditions mainly because of the stop of the armed struggle. This facilitated the space for the municipalities, HADEP and other organizations of the KFM to spread their own political ideas and to get better in contact with new and not politically organized parts of the society. What has been claimed for years, namely that the KFM has better and much more democratic concepts, could be implemented at local level through municipalities and other political organizations. But at the same time the dynamic created by the armed struggle did not exist anymore. A shift in the way of thinking and acting became necessary.

Between 1999 and 2004 HADEP administered 37 municipalities and has been challenged to prove to the population that it is capable to govern better and more socially-responsibly than all other authoritarian and corrupted political parties of the hegemonic system. After taking over of the municipalities the state repression never ceased, but it was much less than in the 1990s. Rather the State's approach was to give some space, but to bring the HADEP (replaced in 2002 by DEHAP, 2004 DTP, 2009 BDP and 2014 HDP/DBP) municipalities with certain imposed policies, including challenging frameworks like neo-liberalism and administrative centralism, to a point where they would fail, thus loose the following local elections and finally lose their attractivity.

The HADEP municipalities, and in broader terms the Kurdish Freedom Movement, have the declared political goal of creating a democratic-ecological society with the year 2000. It was expressed publicly that the approach to the nature would be respectful; natural sites would be conserved and developed within the cities and their surroundings would be more clean and green; and the investments projects would not be implemented at the expense of nature. The practice had to be significantly different from municipalities ruled by other parties which in Kurdistan did not care in any way for ecological life.

These first years were the time when thousands of political activists and other politically-interested people in Kurdistan and Turkey started to read articles and books on ecology and particularly social ecology, including Murray Bookchin. This brought forward the discussion how an ecological life should be developed and what that could mean in long-term and short-term politics. It affected also some employees and politicians in the municipalities. This was important as the difference can be observed sometimes in the details. It should be considered that in the whole state of Turkey the discussions on a more ecological or "sustainable" country were quite new, and political campaigns against destructive and exploitative developments and projects were rarely carried out. But it was also the time when in several regions struggles against large investment projects came up. In Bakur two struggles became widely known. One was against the Ilisu Dam on the Tigris which is planned to flood a large part of the Tigris Valley and the ancient town of Hasankeyf. Another one was against several dams on the Munzur River in Dersim where live mainly people of Alevi believe. Both struggles gained big support amongst the Kurds. The Kurdish society started to discuss for the first time issues of rivers, dams, energy, cultural and natural heritage and development in relation to each other on a broader scale that contributed to an increase of a critical awareness on these issues.

However, in fact the gained municipalities in their first period (until 2004) showed a practice which was by far better than the others from an ecological point of view. The cities became cleaner and healthier with improvement of the waste system, also in the poorest neighborhoods which had been neglected for decades. The drinking water supply and sewage management was improved significantly in several cities within few years. The green area per person increased too. The sites of cultural heritage got more attention

and accessibility for the public. More public spaces like squares or market places had been build up. The public transport had been developed to all settled areas and for a comparatively low price. Some designed large projects with problematic social and ecological impacts had been canceled or changed by the municipalities or not followed up. The life conditions in the poor quarters had been improved also by paving the streets, building social infrastructure like social centers or washing centers for clothes and the neglection of unpaid water bills. Efforts to include civil society groups in the decision-making process on many projects and even city planning became day to day reality. We can state that in the very beginning there were many urgent works in the field of basic services that had to be undertaken. The living quality in most cities was under a big threat – a stress that was exacerbated by the situation of those displaced by conflict in the 1990s.

Although these positive developments occurred, there was lack of an overall consensus as to how to develop a further and future ecological policy and the bigger ecological context could not be explained well. Almost all mayors and policy decision makers of the municipalities and other structures of the KFM did not consider the ecological perspective as one of the main strategic approaches and it remained often secondary if other aspects prevailed. The ecological consciousness of such people stayed limited with the pragmatism of parliamentarism. This was not very surprising as the general political movement stayed weak in the field of ecology and the discussion was quite new for the movement in general and particularly for the broader society. There were no strong actors within society who claimed a stronger ecological policy by the municipalities. In these years the fore-mentioned ecologist movements against dam projects concentrated their efforts on the dam projects; and the new "environmental" associations and civil organizations that were emerging in the cities, including organisations of engineers, architects, lawyers and medical doctors, did not yet demand strongly enough ecological criteria to be included in urban development.

There were two other aspects of relevance. The first is that the society was only just emerging from an extended period of intensive systematic state terror and was still in a phase of basic recovery. The political focus of the KFM was mainly on the human right violations of the 1990s and the demand for Kurdish identity in Bakur to be accepted with basic autonomous rights within the Republic of Turkey. The second is that capitalism in Kurdistan became very strong after the crisis of 2001. In 2003-2004, the official economic growth rate achieved up to ten percent, the money in the economy accumulated significantly and everywhere new and larger investments were done. Many more people started to earn big amounts of money through trade and investments. This created an intense pressure also on the cities in Bakur and approaches to open space for private investors affected almost all municipalities which suffered from structural financial low income. These were the years when neo-liberalism entered Bakur.

In Bakur and also in Başur (with the US occupation in 2003) and Rojhilat,

the development of extractive industries (mining, oil and gas) became very dramatic in these years. Investment projects in all fields had become widespread. In this sense the rural areas had been confronted with the following projects: all rivers should be transformed by hundreds of dams into artificial lakes or dried out by diversion dams; thousands of licenses had been commissioned to companies for test mine drilling; all main roads started to be broadened; mega coal plants had been constructed in several provinces; one of the world´s largest cement factory had been constructed; Bakur had become a hot spot for fracking; and finally the whole agricultural land – even the mountainous areas – faced fast change according to capitalistic market rules. The state planners started to consider each square meter in terms of financially exploitable land and prepared or approved thousands of projects. The AKP government under Erdogan attracted with such policies the interest of global capital. Only the cities administered by the KFM resisted for a big part this development. That is why the government could not implement the most planned policies in half of the cities of Bakur.

In a period when the society of Bakur started to develop quickly an ecological awareness, the neo-liberalized capitalism started to make the largest historical ecological (and thus social) destruction and exploitation in Bakur. The destruction of nature and overcoming of most of remaining social-traditional elements in the society was much more intensive than during the war of the 1990s. Only the mountainous areas with difficult access for humans could recover after 2000.

Ecology within Democratic Confederalism: the Theoretical Concept

On Newroz 2005, Abdullah Öcalan declared "Democratic Confederalism" as the new political-theoretical concept of the Kurdish Freedom Movement. Thereby the writings and discussions of the prior years and the whole experience of 30 years of struggle could be summarized and put into relation to each other in a systematic way. Without doubt Democratic Confederalism cannot be considered disconnected from the discussions and critics after the collapse of the "state/real socialism" around 1990 and the new leftist and libertarian social and political movements all around the world. The outcome was a critical, inclusive and radical thinking with new perspectives for the Kurds in relation with other people in the Middle East. The new political concept is being expressed with a paradigm based on three pillars. An ecological approach to the life was stressed as much as radical democracy, which goes beyond parliamentarianism, and gender liberation with a focus on women liberation. To repeat the obvious: The pillars and the whole concept are expressed with the aim to achieve a liberated, emancipated, equal and solidarity-based society in harmony with nature.

Radical democracy and women´s liberation had been stressed and developed strongly among the Kurds already for many years before. But actually each of the three pillars of Democratic Confederalism cannot be thoroughly developed without links to the other two. However the initial starting point is

women's liberation.

Prior to 5000 years of women's oppression and exclusion evolved the Neolithic period when a complete communal social order was created around woman which can be also called matricentric society. Öcalan emphasizes that this social order saw none of the enforcement practices of the state order and existed for thousands of years. It is characterized by equality and freedom, was viable because the social morality of the matriarchal order did not allow ownership and it had a harmony with the nature. It is this long-lasting order that shaped humanity's collective social consciousness; and it is our endless yearning to regain and immortalise this social order of equality and freedom that led to our construct of paradise.

Öcalan states that with the overcoming of matriacentric society by patriarchy institutionalized hierarchical structures had emerged and spread among human societies and characterized the upcoming states until nowadays. Long before explicit social classes came into being, the first oppressed and exploited class are women. This has been followed in the following centuries and millenia by the oppression of children and man. This political-ideological formation led also to the domination and destruction of nature by humans during the different periods of human history. The ecological exploitation and destruction must be analyzed basically from such an approach.

Today the conservative and reactionary approaches of existing states is experienced in the first instance by society through the oppression of women. Another important point is that Women as oppressed gender have a stronger relation to the nature than men; in all patriarchal societies men are usually more attached to power and thus are more alienated from nature than. Thus, the struggle for an ecological and liberated society means in the end also the struggle against patriarchy and liberation of women or, to put it another way, without the liberation of women there cannot be an ecological society.

As the oppression of society starts with patriarchy, it is logical that the KFM has started to focus more and more on the liberation of women which at the same is the liberation of all kind of genders and the whole society. Within the KFM, this consciousness came out to top in the beginning of the 1990s and thus an intensive and widespread discussion on women's liberation started which became more deep and systematic after the halt of the war in Bakur in 1999 and additionally more with the development of Democratic Confederalism.

Discussing more in depth the approach of the KFM on nature, firstly it has to be stated that the KFM views nature as the body of all living beings, including humans. Humans are part of nature and do not stand over it or any species. Like in the Neolithic Period it is regarded as alive and animated, no different from themselves. All living beings are part of one common big ecosystem which offers enough opportunities to live for everybody. Nature was omnipresent, there was for the significant majority of people always in

the daily life a strong connection with nature. Öcalan describes this as follows: “This past awareness of nature fostered a mentality that recognized a multitude of sanctities and divinities in nature. We may gain a better understanding of the essence of collective life if we acknowledge that it was based on the metaphysics of sanctity and divinity, stemming from reverence for the mother-woman.” Today there are still some beliefs where in nature are a multitude of sanctities and divinities, one of them is the Alevi belief. Consequently for spirituality and inspiration among humans nature was and is the main source.

Based on through adherence to ecological principles nature should be treated respectfully and not as a resource for profit. Nature was and is the source of food, housing and all other material needs of life. Under capitalist modernity, humans living in urban centers are usually weakly connected to nature and understand less the relation and connection to nature. Nature had and has a multidimensional meaning in life and is essential for the development of culture and identity as well as spirituality. Due to the alienation between human beings which contributes significantly to the alienation between nature and human beings, nowadays nature is overexploited. Despite everyone experiencing the impacts of grave ecological destruction in the next decades, the destruction of nature seems to continue. The current approach of human driven capitalist modernity is a state of betrayal of humans to nature, to their body.

In this sense, if human beings would meet only their needs,[4] nature would not experience serious destruction and the ecosystems would have the capacity to recover itself. At this point, the question what is the real need of people today is not easy to be responded and should not be left only to biologists or economists, rather it relates to the question of democracy, i.e. whether a society can take decisions under broadly democratic conditions free from imposed exploitative-extractive economy policies. We assume that in a liberated, solidarity-based, radical-democratic and ecological society there will be no pressure to over-extract “elements” [5] from nature.

Do not forget that humans are not only physical or material organisms, they have strong and deep immaterial feelings and metaphysical needs in their life. Although humans cannot express them, they do not think and act only in a rational way. For thousands of years, people have sought inspiration and motivation following different methods, including retiring from their surroundings to nature. With the exponential increase of urbanization, asphalt application, cultivation of landscape and investment projects all over the territories, less areas are suitable in this sense and so it becomes always more difficult for inspiration by nature, in capitalist modernity particularly for poorer people from cities who have less financial capacities to experience directly nature. In connection with that this affects also physical reproduction and recovery activities for people from urban centers.

Communities far away from the urban centers, industry and industrial

agricultural areas are closer to nature and have more spiritual connection with environment. The less there is capitalist modernity, the more natural and spiritual the life can be. If such communities in non-urban areas belong to oppressed groups like the indigenous peoples of Latin America, the Adivasi from India and Alevi Kurds, then the connection to nature may have an additional importance because the oppressed peoples express themselves also through nature. In this sense the nature is a very essential part of their oppressed identity. Accordingly the destruction or misappropriation of nature by the colonialist force is an elimination of their identity. This is often not much understood by people in the capitalist and big urban centers where life no longer has has a strong relation to nature.

In the ideology of the KFM, the ecological perspective is considered of strategical importance and as a tool to create awareness in the whole human society and all human linked activities and processes from a nature conservation, anti-capitalist and holistic perspective. In doing so, the approach is that the dimensions not covered by gender liberation or radical democracy would be expressed with ecology. In this sense, the emphasis on ecology within Democratic Confederalism can be understood also as the completion of the two other pillars.

However, it should be underlined that nature conservation and even nature restoration by humans is a strategic goal. From the very beginning on, the KFM stressed that each living being has the right to exist due to its natural occurrence. The life of animals and plants must be protected actively by humans. Regarding nature conservation, the goal to limit and stop anthropogenic climate change is a crucial topic, as in the next decades it could affect in a much more dramatic way everything on our planet – actually Kurdistan and Middle East have already been affected for almost two decades due to decreasing precipitation. Climate change is no less important than "nature conservation" (here it meant projects/policies to conserve species, habitats and areas of high biodiversity) and reverse, as some environmental organizations or politicians prioritize in their discussions, they are mutually dependent and should not be treated independently from each other. Climate change can not be limited without the conservation and restoration of forests, vegetation, rivers, water cycle, soil, air etc. For the KFM, climate change is part of nature conservation and a reason why in this paper climate change is not mentioned specifically.

Thus it is concluded that each struggle against ecological destruction is very essential and a necessary step to reestablish a relation to nature for many people; but in long-term not enough to protect the contested natural area and related human society. Not enough because the related investment project as well as all other destructive projects are caused by the dominant political-economic system. This dominant system will never step back to implement all designed and planned projects.

That is why being ecological means also to criticize all processes in the

society, particularly the way of producing and consuming, feeding, housing, mobilization, organizing leisure etc. The KFM rejects categorically the way these models are implemented by capitalist modernity and the direction they take today – KFM's insistence on communal life is an expression of such a rejection. The current level of consumption is without doubt too much for the earth. Going on like this would end in the dramatic destruction or significant deterioration of all existing ecosystems and the loss of the most biodiversity. If there is no deceleration in the short-term and significant conceptional change in mid-term, nature's destruction and climate change will continue and the basis of life will become much weaker with grave impacts for the ecosystems, biodiversity, animals, plants and billions of humans. The worst affected people would be mainly people, communities and states with weak socio-economic capacities.

To achieve a considerable change of these models, the basic approach must be to reduce consumption of energy and material by at least 80 % in industrial states in mid-term and to find a new balance where each human has the same amount of energy and material for use; one important criteria should be to allow degraded ecosystems and biodiversity to recover.

At this point it should be emphasized that each destruction of nature or ecosystem has serious impacts on humans and is thus a social destruction – several factors determine the level. Each investment project like dams and mining has the high potential to destroy nature as well as to violate the basic rights of affected people. So ecological destruction must be understood also as the violation of political, social, cultural and economic rights of people. This connection is still not made by many critical activists or analysts in our world.

Going one step further the KFM is aware that with capitalism – even without neo-liberalism – the ecological destruction can never be stopped, not to mention the reversal, i.e. the renaturation of nature and restoration of climate balance. If capitalism dominates the global economy and capitalist modernity the political sphere, there will be an intense pressure to have "growth" in the capitalist sense and (almost) no space to develop other forms of living, for democratic decision-making processes and a communal and democratic economy. Over centuries and decades, capitalist modernity has conquered the brains and behaviors of billions of humans in a subtle way. It cannot be overcome with a concept based only on new social and economic goals as "real/state socialism" intended to do. Hierarchy, state and capitalism is firstly an ideological development.

Capitalist modernity has started to deepen at an accelerated tempo the alienation of humans from humans and from nature; and this much more than the former hierarchical political systems. Particularly in the last 200 years each area of the world and each community has been affected by capitalist modernity. Nowadays all people – except the rich – have been put under pressure with neo-liberalism. Through displacing people from their natural

environments by physical or economic force to cities, humans lost their culture of living in much more natural surroundings. And when territories are under threat by such destructive investments in areas where people are oppressed on the basis of their identity, the displacement of people by nation-states contributes to the assimilation of cultures under threat and pressure. Small or marginalized oppressed cultures are particularly affected by such policies. The Kurds are one important example for that.

People in cities do not only consume, they are also disconnected from their strong social and cultural heritage and thus are lost fishes in the sea easily to catch. Disconnected from their cultural past means, among others, to be open for extreme individualistic and isolated ways of life where a healthy balance between individuals and society does not exist. People alienated from nature and communal and solidarity-based relations are much easier to become instruments of exploitation in industrial production, consumption, reactionary thoughts and establishing of authoritarian political systems. Urban people do not know usually any more the name of most plants and animals and how in practice processes in nature function or how humans can benefit from them sustainably as our ancestors have done it for thousands of years. So humans in cities do not live the nature on a daily basis. In other words, humans do not feel soil, plants, water, sun and air and start to lose a deep understanding for them and their context; they may know it usually in theory like biologists. In cities, more now than ever before, everything is organized with money while villagers still can produce some of their needs, exchange goods among themselves and support each other with self produced goods. People in rural areas are usually less affected by capitalist modernity and reproduce a thinking and lifestyle less connected to capitalism and state hegemony. In cities, on average humans are faced with more psychological and social traumas than in rural communities; and these traumas are transferred to their children. The traumas of displaced people from rural areas are maybe the worst. Actually, today the majority of our societies live under heavy psychological conditions.

Capitalist modernity creates people offering their labor force to private companies or public organizations without to produce any of their needs as their ancestors did in villages. Thus from their salary they have to buy all their needs. These people are put under hard and stressful working conditions. . Working people under permanent pressure did not care much about the ongoing ecological destruction in the first period of industrialization when working conditions and salaries were in the center of their interest. Although strong trade unions did not developed an ecological approach until recently. However after generations more and more people in almost all parts of the world have started to think about ecology and alternatives to the capitalist way of living. While in the older industrial states the most people start to learn facts on nature and an ecological life from zero, in the newly or hardly industrialized states there are much more characteristics and remnants of non-capitalistic relations, processes and thinking on which critical people can build up. The recovery can be realized

in an easier and faster way as for example critical people can benefit from the experience of their grand parents or even parents. Kurdistan is such a geography.

While above the connection between ecology and women´s liberation has been introduced, there is still the connection between ecology and democracy to be described. In order to defend nature and ecological relations, destructive and exploitative projects need to be stopped and the models of housing, production, consumption, mobility etc have to be altered radically. All this can be done only if democratic decision making structures are dominant in the society, i.e. radical democracy is developed, and no more small circles in the society can influence via lobbying the political decision. Only when there is an economy based on solidarity and communality can the big ecological destruction be prevented in long-term. Summing up it can be analyzed that the connection between ecology and democracy is realized particularly via the sphere of economic relations.

The KFM has developed over the years some new terminology with the concept of Democratic Confederalism which may be of interest. Many movements do this, but within Democratic Confederalism some more words have been created. It starts with the name of the concept. Some definitions are a combination of words like “democracy” and “autonomy” or “democratic” and “nation” which are widely used . The theory of Democratic Confederalism follows also the line to occupy existing crucial definitions like “nation” or “modernity” and to give them also a positive content in a certain framework. From an ecological perspective within Democratic Confederalism the terms “ecological industry” and “communal life” is of higher relevance. Ecological industry may be controversial as industrial activities have led to a big part to the destruction and pollution of the nature and concentrate continuously economic and political power. But at the same time the human societies have achieved a point of life and economical relation which can not be maintained without industry. For the KFM “industry” is understood as the production of goods in a systematic and concentrated, i.e. by mechanized processes, way. . It needs some expert skills and higher technologies. Actually primitive forms of industry exists for a long period in human history. The current level of industry with its negative impacts was not inevitable; history could have taken a different turn. However, nowadays it is extremely challenging (almost impossible) to de-industrialize societies which would have incalculable risks. Thus the question is how to reorganize the industry in terms of technology, capacity and management from an ecological perspective and breaking with the existing concept of economic growth. Democratic Confederalism has on this topic yet no well-developed concepts, but rather basic ideas.

Role of the Guerrilla in the growing Ecological Awareness

The increasing ecological awareness is related also to the guerrilla of the PKK, the People’s Defense Forces HPG, which never ceased to exist widespread in the mountains of North and South Kurdistan since the 80ies.

The HPG has thousands of guerrillas in huge areas of Northern Kurdistan, and in a broad stretch of 250 km in South Kurdistan; thus must be considered as a geographically and political highly important factor. When not fighting with the Turkish Army, the guerrillas spend their time in a mix of military and political education. In South Kurdistan, the focus is even more on political discussion and education.

The guerrillas discuss the entire range of social and political issues in their political educational program. Since the 1990s when Öcalan started to discuss the ecological crisis , the guerrilla included ecology in their discussions. The manner in which it discusses ecology and all the other topics differs from people and organizations in the broader Kurdish society, which makes the discussion itself more independent. The guerrillas are not part of the hegemonic political system and have no narrow individual expectations from the state or others. In contrast, people and organizations from the "normal" society are influenced continuously by concerns and personal limitations. Even if they struggle intensively to get rid of influences by capitalism and statism, there is always a remaining part.

The difference with the guerrilla is that since its emergence in the beginning of the 1990s, the life conditions are exceedingly difficult, but completely communal, based on solidarity and far away from capitalist modernity. There is almost no private propriety existing; money and material interests play no role in the relations among humans; decisions are taken sometimes on a basis democratic way; and a system of criticism and self-criticism is implemented systematically.

Concerning ecology, it is also very crucial that the guerrilla lives in harmony with the nature. There is almost no negative impact by the guerrilla on plants, animals and ecosystems; rather in the last years they care more than ever on this issue. The life is oriented strongly alongside ecological criteria. It comes along that the existence of the guerrilla in many mountainous regions leads to the prevention of widespread hunting, and to the preservation of many forests through calls or bans on the start or continuation of numerous destructive infrastructure projects of the Turkish state or the Kurdish Regional Government in South Kurdistan.

The discussions and proposals for overcoming the ecological crisis are often practiced in the guerrilla areas on a small scale and as much as possible in the lives of individual guerillas and as a community. So there are not solely theoretical outcomes, there is also a dimension of practice. Through this practice in some cases the guerrilla can adjust their first theoretical assumptions.

The ecological practice of the guerrilla can be explained with the following examples. It is absolutely forbidden to throw away waste like plastic or metal in the environment; trees are cut only under exceptional cases; animals are hunted not much and only in a way so that no species would be endangered

in a certain region – some species could recover; a few dozen small diversion dams for electricity are built in South Kurdistan which divert usually one third of the flowing water (most states divert between 2/3 and 90%); as much as possible food is produced by the guerrilla's own means in the mountains.

The results and developed approaches of the guerrilla reflect the material conditions with the strong characteristics of solidarity, communality and ecology; and they challenge the other parts of the society – particularly the part of the population which is physically and politically close to them. The reason is that criticsm is much more profound and ideologically justified, the claims are higher and there are less "realistic" elements which could limit thinking. Thus the guerrilla accept fewer compromises and thus fewer spaces for capitalism. The approaches of the guerrilla are closer to harmony with nature and request stronger and broader communal structures.

Developed approaches and proposals on ecology – like with the other fields – can be connected and transferred quite easily to the broader society of Kurdistan as there is a strong relation of the guerrilla with the Kurdish society. Consider that each year hundreds of thousands of people meet and discuss with guerrillas. Coming from the capitalist modernity and meeting revolutionaries who share communal life affects these people and beyond, especially young ones.

However in all fields two basic approaches within the Kurdish Freedom Movement – one represented mainly by the expressed ideas of the guerrilla – collide often in a strong way. Not all proposals are approved one to one by political activists or politically interested people in the broad society who live in different material conditions. There are aspects which the guerrilla does not consider in their discussions as they live far away and in different and extraordinary conditions. Generally, the approaches of the guerrilla are closer to what is considered more democratic, communal, gender liberated and ecological.

The synthesis must have been in majority of the cases the most correct way as the KFM managed to survive and to get stronger in the last years. We can say that the mountain-city relations of the Kurds have created over the years a specific dynamic which is beneficial for the whole KFM.

How the Contradiction creates a Dynamic

The Kurdish Freedom Movement has been winning the local elections in an increasing number of cities in North Kurdistan since 1999, and they have acquired some important knowledge on how local governments can transform the society to be more social, gender liberated and ecologically oriented. It is only since 2010/2011 that the reasons to transform life ecologically were grasped substantially; previously, the approach and the discourse of ecology were rather shallow as described above.

There are basically three reasons for that. First, capitalist relations continued to advance quickly in North Kurdistan in the second part of the 2000's and the ecological destruction reached seriously concerning levels. Second, the concept of Democratic Confederalism has encouraged and strengthened ecologists in Bakur to deepen and broaden their struggle. Third, the critic and resistance against the ecological destruction and exploitation increased in an organized way, gathered some serious experience and even small successes.

The book In defense of a People by Öcalan published in 2004 and the declaration of Democratic Confederalism in March 2005 contributed definitively to the better systematization of the ideas and discussion on an ecological society in Bakur and other parts of Kurdistan. In the first months after the declaration of Democratic Confederalism, there was a controversial discussion among many political activists within the KFM or those close to it, about the pillar ecology. While for the activists who already incorporating ecology in their activism and discussions this was very encouraging and supportive, the others either did not take it into account seriously or raised concerned and considered it premature to emphasize ecology or "not fitting to the reality of Kurdish society". However, in general, the political structures of the KFM welcomed the pillar ecology and started to discuss it – even if it was still only superficially. At least it opened the mind for ecological discussions, campaigns and requests.

Just in this time the Ilisu Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant, the largest dam project in planning or construction in Bakur and Turkey, came again on the agenda after the Turkish government started a new effort to build it – the first attempt had failed in 2001/2002. Between 2006 and 2010 the struggle against this dam project, which would have huge grave impacts on social structures, cultural heritage and the Tigris ecosystem and destructive consequences for the local society, was continuously on the agenda of the Kurds and got support by many Kurdish organizations, activists and media. Co-ordinated by the Initiative to Keep Hasankeyf Alive this campaign was an expression of the increased ecological and cultural awareness among the Kurds. It contributed at a new level to the questioning of energy, water, agriculture and development policies of the Turkish state and exceeded significantly the discussions during the first round of struggle on the Ilisu project between 1999 and 2002.

In the following years there was a steady increase in the number of groups and people working on issues concerning nature conservation, the impacts of big infrastructure and energy projects, food production and social ecology theory. Associations and initiatives opposing dams, mining, coal plants, environmental pollution, urban development, commercialization of life etc. have been initiated or strengthened for example in Amed, Dersim, Çolemerg (Hakkari), Batman, Qoser (Kiziltepe), Wan and Riha (Urfa). Although in these years the diversity of contested project types broadened, dams were still the main challenge for the ecology movements. These were the years when each square kilometer of Bakur and the whole Turkish state territory have

been considered by state planners and big companies as a source of profit – internationally this approach started to be discussed as "extractivism". Capitalism was spreading to all niches of the society of Bakur. The capitalist modernity unfolded its maximum destructive forces, the AKP government did everything to enable investments in the region. The need to form a coalition of groups and activists with a strong ecological and critic awareness in Bakur has become important in these years.

Considering these growing protests and the need to act in a comprehensive way against the encroachment of neo-liberal capitalism, the co-ordination of the Mesopotamian Social Forum, which has been organized for the first time in 2009 in Amed, decided to organize an Ecology Forum. At this forum in January 2011 with the contribution of activists by all struggles of Bakur, researchers, representatives of different civil organizations and movements and activists from Turkey and other countries, ecological struggles and approaches were discussed in Kurdistan in a broad and organized way for the first time in history. As consequence of the forum, "ecology activists" started a discussion to form a network of groups in Bakur. It took more than one and half year to achieve the first meetings of about ten groups and a decision to form the "Mesopotamia Ecology Movement" was taken. The theoretical basis from the very beginning on was Social Ecology and Democratic Confederalism. Although the name described it as a movement, rather in the first years it was a network.

In these years capitalism has started to affect in a strong way also some political structures and thinking of activists in the KFM, including municipalities and activists in small towns. Due to the fact that there was still a lack of system and depth in the discussion of ecology regarding all decisions and actions within the KFM, it is not surprising that some people and structures acted contrarily. The impact in the practice was that, among others, the behavior and approaches of political parties and organizations of the existing hegemonic system did not change significantly for many activists of the KFM decisions like city planning did not really brake with capitalist-statist prescriptive practices; some mayors were co-opted by local entrepreneurs to get tenders; and competition far away from solidarity relations between organizations and activists partly increased. These challenges may always come up and become dominant in the case of a not very well developed and accepted radical democratic structure with transparent and inclusive decision-making processes. The KFM had only started in 2007 to set up a completely new political structure which takes the paradigm of Democratic Confederalism as basis. The Democratic Society Congress (in Kurdish: KCD; in Turkish: DTK) as the umbrella structure of the KFM for the new people's councils from the neighborhoods, civil society organizations, social movements, professional organizations, municipalities and political parties was quite new and still in the process of finding a way to function properly given the big diversity of above-mentioned structures.

In the initial stage, the Mesopotamia Ecology Movement (MEM) was

challenged to find ways to bring the member groups together around subjects, campaigns and discussions and set up a permanent and reliable working structure. If this could be realized, the struggle against the numerous destructive and exploitative projects and policies of the state could be confronted better and within the KCD the struggle for ecological discussions, thinking and approaches would get more political weight. In confronting the government`s projects and objectives, a continuously rising number of people started to question the state policies in other areas. Not only the policies on Kurdish identity, collective rights, education, women's rights, militarization, but also those on economy, energy, agriculture and related issues in Bakur became more and more a focus of the political struggle. Each economic decision or investment project started to be perceived more critically.

At the same time, the municipalities governed by the legal party of the KFM came under a critical focus by the MEM because municipalities acting against the political goals of the general movement would harm the whole struggle, including the ecological dimension. The demand was that municipal politics had to be changed comprehensively along ecological principles, developed by the MEM, and the self-administration of people's councils. The aim of the state is clear: it wants to dominate, oppress and exploit the society in close cooperation with big companies, and in Bakur also with middle big companies. In this struggle, the KFM municipalities had to make a clear stance against the state policies. Although municipalities are according to Turkish law in the end an organ of the central government, they have limited capacities and freedom with which they could challenge state policies. While on the one hand they are forced to act in compliance with Turkish law, on the other hand the municipalities should do everything in their powerto support radical democratic structures in the society, i.e. particularly the people's councils, women's self-organization and a communal economy, as well as taking as stance against the gentrification of urban areas and bringing equitably services to the entire population. But the reality in these years was often only in part like this. Capitalism has put the municipalities of Bakur under the pressure to follow the neo-liberal AKP municipalities as development model through the domination of discussions about urban development. It was a time – up until 2011 – when economic growth in Turkey was high, the social contradictions in Turkey and Bakur were significantly less and the AKP government was still not very repressive: hence, the criticsm by the KFM against capitalist modernity did not go down well in Kurdish society. Another pressure was systematic financial discrimination by the Turkish national government: since 1999, KFM municipalities could not benefit from many governmental funds unlike other municipalities.Obstacles were also often created in the approval of big projects (each big project needs usually approval by the governor who is directly appointed by the Turkish government) and the KFM municipalities have not been supported with experts and skills like the other municipalities. This latter discrimination was not very surprising as the Kurds have been oppressed since the foundation of the Republic of Turkey. It is a subject with which a struggle is needed.

However, what was more concerning for the MEM was the lacking stance of the municipalities on capitalist development. In this respect,one case became important for the ecology struggle in Kurdistan. It is about the hill "Kırklar Dağı" in the outskirts of the city of Amed where a housing project was announced in 2009. As a historical and natural area at the south edge of the city of Amed, Kırklar Dağı is very known among the population and thus a sensitive location. When the physical preparation for the housing projects started in 2011/2012, which actually was not in line with the master plan approved in 2006, the MEM and some other civil organizations requested an immediate stop and cancellation: after long discussions and negotiations, the two involved municipalities of Amed rejected this demand. So, when the construction started fully in 2013 a demonstration by the MEM with thousands of people was organized. Although the project did not stop, the demonstration was a novum for the KFM: a civil organization criticized publicly in a sharp way a municipality from the "own political movement" because of an urban project. However, this had some long-term impacts. In the following years, the Democratic Regions Party (DBP; the party of the KFM and member of the HDP) municipalities started to act more carefully when they planned any housing or bigger project. This case showed that thinking and acting ecologically needs activists to consider also their own side and not the other side, the state and big capital. Apart from the case of Kırklar Dağı there are many other projects in the cities, which are object of capitalist transformation and need to be regarded much more critically.

Another criticsm of the MEM targets the big shopping malls which have been constructed in the last years in each city. These are private projects and of course supported by the AKP government, but there were some cases where the DBP municipalities have not intervened and in few cases even welcomed them. Some of the shopping malls could have been prevented, or at least delayed. The Turkish law allows the central government to take over city planning whenever it considers necessary. So, the question is how to resist this legal unfairness; even if it not possible to impede in the long-term the non-wanted projects, at least they should be delayed and subject to public debate. After intensive criticsm by the MEM and other movements like the women´s movement in 2014, a much more critical approach has been implemented by the DBP municipalities.

These two cases show that the ecology struggle in Bakur has not only to focus only in rural areas, but also in urban areas, because capitalism has started many years ago to seek for profitable investment projects everywhere. 2013 was the year when an ecological awareness and criticsm started to express itself much more openly, accompanied by public actions and this not only through the MEM. The youth movement, women´s movement, professional organizations (particularly architects, engineers, medical doctors), trade unions achieved qualitatively a new level in their approach as to how society mightbe conceived from an ecological perspective.

At this point, it needs to be stated that within the concept of Democratic

Confederalism one field – in Bakur society is organized by the Democratic Society Congress (DTK/KCD) into 14 fields (also branch or sector), like women, justice, health, education, diplomacy, beliefs, ecology, municipalities, youth, self-defence – is usually promoted by one movement or organization, but it is not only limited to this organization. Actually, it is favored that activists from other fields also discuss deeply ecology, women´s liberation or communal-democratic economy. For this, the connections between the fields become important. In parliamentarian systems, ecological/environmental NGOs and movements act usually on their own for the objective to stop certain projects and/or to change the laws or society in ecological sense. In the new system of Bakur – and Rojava – the social movements struggle for their objectives, but do it within a democratic and inclusive system. This comes from the perception that society is one whole and has been divided by capitalist modernity so much that the different social and political groups and genders do not act in balance with each other: one group tries always to dominate the other one. In capitalist modernity, usually the groups with big financial capacities or weapons dominate over the others. This is a significant difference which has been brought by Democratic Confederalism.

An example how the different movements can work successfully together and how much the different fields are interrelated, are the relations of the MEM with the economy movement. The economy movement has been formed in 2013 after broad discussions by dozens of activists from different struggles and critical economists from Bakur and Turkey. Among these people were several activists from the MEM. Since then there is a good connection and exchange between the two branches. The good relationship has brought together the two branches into cooperation on certain projects; projects which are related to both fields ecology and economy. One example is the long-discussed construction of a bank for local organic seeds. A dynamic, cooperative and critical relation with the new upcoming economy movement, which wants to develop a communal and democratic economy in Bakur, is crucial for the aim to develop an ecological society. All that is discussed and developed among the MEM is aimed to be implemented in cooperation with the economy field as well with as the municipalities. Without considering communal economy, an ecological society is impossible as described above.

The Mesopotamia Ecology Movement

In 2014, a new discussion among the activists of the MEM about its restructuring with the aim to become a real and broad social movement started. After many discussions, it resulted in the formation of councils in each province of Bakur which offered space for political activists working on ecology and for newcomers. All previous and new initiatives and associations and activists working on ecology, but also other civil society organizations, professional organizations, unions, municipalities and the people's councils of the KCD in the urban quarters and rural regions had been invited to participate. This form of representation intends to include as much as possible of societal playors and to establish something which in short and

medium term should build a society that is more ecological, and thus, more just and democratic.

The main work of the MEM is done in the different commissions which are established according to the needs and emphasis defined by the provincial councils. Every activist in the MEM joins at least one commission in its province. Apart from the commissions which exist in nearly every province, there are some specific commissions. For example, in the province Dersim, there is one commission for forests and, in the metropolitan area of Amed, one for animal rights. There are also a few commissions at the Bakur level, like those for diplomacy, law and organising. The co-ordination at provincial level consists of the two co-spokespersons – one woman and one man. The co-chairs are elected periodically (3 or 6 months) by the provincial assembly which gathers at least twice a year (sometimes 4 times each year). Each provincial assembly elects annually several (around 6) delegates based on gender quota for the assembly at Bakur level which meets twice a year. The co-ordinations at provincial level elect two delegates, one woman and one man, for the Bakur co-ordination which meets more often than the Bakur assembly. As it can be determined within the MEM each structure has a gender minimum quota of 40% for its delegates. The MEM has a 50% quota.

Since this restructuring the MEM is now represented more strongly in the KCD through the actions, projects and campaigns it is realizing. The MEM can bring better its content and requests to the co-ordinations of the KCD on provincial and Bakur level and to the KCD general assembly. The stronger the MEM is, the more it can have impacts on the KCD as a whole, and on its activists. For example, it is crucial to work towards those municipalities which have no good practice on ecology as well as on other issues.

The MEM is connected quite well with many ecological movements and NGO's outside of Bakur within the Turkish state. Since 2015 for several times there were common actions, delegations (like on forest fires) and discussions. In this sense it is part of the ecology council of the People Democratic Council (HDK). The HDK is the turkey-wide supra-structure of all structures of direct democracy, thus also including the HDP. In other words, HDK is equivalent to KCD while not being comparatively strong like the KCD.

Since its start the MEM had to struggle with a low awareness for ecology in society which has its impacts in the different organizations of the KCD. Although there is a meaningful change in the last years, ecology is still considered by a big part of the society as something elitist and far away from real life and is associated with focusing on the conservation of some species or important natural areas or having healthy but expensive organic food. Moreover the terminology used still does not make much understandable what the activists are seeking. That is why practice has become so crucial in order to attract more people for the movement. Considering that even a large number of people with an academic background are interested less in theory and more in practice, projects on the ground can motivate and activate many

and can make better understandable what is aimed with an ecological society. Projects like common gardening and traditional construction, which all interested people can join, have also the impact that the MEM can validate and develop its theoretical approach based on the outcomes of such projects. This should be considered also in the light that the KFM starts with the general approach in the most fields of society and substantiate its approach in a protracted process of practice and discussion. Projects on the ground offer collective work and give back the feeling of community and solidarity to people, particularly from cities. One successful project was the collection of local and organic seeds from different areas Bakur in the winter 2015/2016 and their reproduction in 2016 in seven provinces. The reproduction has been done mostly with the local people's neighborhood councils which is a good example how the different fields of the KCD can work together. This campaign on seeds received interest by many parts of the society. Considering that humans are rational as well as emotional beings, touching soil, water, mud, plants and wood can create a big synergy. A further result such a practical approach can have: in times of repression and war it can hold people together and allows them to come through politically difficult periods like the one started with the war in summer 2015 which worsened with the state of emergency in summer 2016.

In autumn 2015 the MEM conducted a half year discussion on the eight main political fields (agriculture, energy, water, health, communal economy, forests/biodiversity, ecological cities, eco-technology) for what working groups at Bakur level had been established. At the end of these processes, papers have been prepared and later approved at the first MEM conference in April 2016 in Wan. These policy papers have become the guidelines for the future work which cover a broad span and are linked to other political fields like women's liberation, economy and health. This challenging work may help to find initial answers on the question as to which direction the MEM should take, strengthen without doubt the commitment to the struggle and privide tools for successfully struggling against state and companies as well as within the KFM.

Remarks

1) It needs to be stated that the heavy political repression in Bakur on all levels of political engagement, which started in summer 2015 and achieved with the state of emergency, declared in July 2016, an extreme level, has affected in a strong way also the MEM. Since then the most activities of the MEM have been limited, halted or changed. However the activities have undergone some important change. In this paper the period after the state of emergency has not been considered. Rather it has been aimed to describe the development of the consciousness and discussion on and the struggle for ecology in Bakur before the current repression.

2) The discussions and practice of Rojava has not been included in this paper as there are very different frameworks (no state any more, much less capitalism etc.) although the political concept is the same.

5 Reber Apo is a Permaculturalist - Permaculture and Political Transformation in North East Syria

By Viyan Qerecox

If Reber Apo, the imprisoned leader of the Kurdish liberation movement, was a gardener, I would expect his garden to be colourful and wild, spilling out beyond its borders, a glorious mixture of vegetables, trees, flowers and vines. Drawing on his writings on political transformation, I imagine him to be a permaculturalist, creating gardens based on the wisdom of nature. Permaculture is a design system that strives to make ecological spaces sustainable and productive. But the approach is also geared towards other kinds of design, whether it's architecture, urban planning, organisational structures or even political systems. The word comes from a combination of "permanent" and "culture," so at it's most fundamental it's an attempt to develop a culture of permanence. In this case, permanent does not mean static – like nature, the system must grow and develop as it responds to internal and external change – but it is permanent in that it is not geared towards self-destruction in the way that our current agricultural systems tend to be.

Permaculture takes a values-centred approach, so the ethics of "earth care, people care and fair shares" hold the centre, and from there productive and sustainable outputs shape the form. Permaculture is a holistic system – it insists that we look not just at component parts of a design, but at the relationships between them, and how they come together to create a whole. A permaculture garden aims to take inspiration from the way in which ecological systems sustain themselves in nature, with the saying "think like a forest, act like a meadow" giving a poetic insight into the permaculture approach. Forests and meadows are both ecosystems which sustain an astounding diversity of life within a "closed loop" and resilient system. They don't require external fertiliser, chemical pesticides or artificial watering systems. And yet they sustain impressive numbers of plant and animal species, plus countless fungi, bacteria and micro-organisms in the soil which are also crucial to keeping the system healthy. A permaculture garden would seek to replicate these patterns and relationships. Rather than growing plants in isolated rows, a permaculture garden would group plants together so they can work collectively. A classic example of this – drawn from indigenous knowledge – is the 'three sisters' planting pattern. Maize, climbing beans and squash are grown together, so that the squash covers the soil to keep moisture in the ground, the climbing beans put nutrients into the soil that the other plants need, and the maize provides a climbing structure for the beans. If planted in this way, this vegetable patch preserves soil quality, reduces need

for water and improves harvest, so it's sustainable and efficient. This is one of many approaches that permaculture harnesses through its twelve principles, which encompass concepts such as “produce no waste,” “use and value diversity,” “creatively use and respond to change,” and “design from pattern to detail.”

Making the leap from gardens to revolutionary approaches in political organising, we can see a lot of useful parallels that show us how to build movements, organisations and communities which are productive, sustainable and holistic. But before we explore the compatibilities of permaculture and political transformation, let's look at why it even makes sense to do it.

One reason has already been mentioned – permaculture takes a holistic approach to developing strategies and solutions, and having a coherent framework is crucial to having an effective political strategy. This is a strength of the Kurdish liberation ideology as shaped by Reber Apo and more recently, the New Paradigm. It already takes a holistic ideological approach, recognising the interconnection between patriarchy, capitalism, the state and ecological destruction. In the West, too often we firefight between issues, not developing or expressing a coherent ideology which effectively highlights and challenges the structural causes of what we are fighting against.

Permaculture is also a useful tool for developing a new way of doing politics – one which is less shaped by the dominating relationships that have characterised politics since the rise of the state. Patriarchy and capitalism enact dominating relations between people, while at the same time establishing a dominating relationship with the environment. So the way that we relate to each other is inextricable from how we relate to nature, and we can look to nature for a different approach. A new way of doing politics means doing politics in a women's way (a way which rejects patriarchal approaches) and in an ecological way, and permaculture can shed some light on what an ecological way of doing politics could look like.

The political transformation that has been happening through the Rojava Revolution in North East Syria recognises the importance of this shift in mentality, which is why it is particularly interesting to analyse the movement through the lens of permaculture. One principle of permaculture which invites interesting analyses is “creatively use and respond to change,” which is sometimes conceptualised as “the problem is the solution.” This principle aims to communicate that sometimes when things aren't going as they should, the solution lies within the problem. The most famous example is that if your garden is overrun by slugs, rather than investing in chemical pesticides or spending hours plucking slugs from lettuce leaves, you could introduce some ducks into your garden. The ducks will happily munch on the slugs while also producing delicious eggs and healthy fertiliser for your garden. Politically, “creatively use and respond to change” can mean anything from repurposing viral right-wing slogans and brands with our own message (“Make Rojava Green Again” can be an example of this) to using the chaos and collapse of

current political and economic systems as an opportunity to organise and build resistance. It's also about being able to see things in unconventional ways. An interesting example of this is the new paradigm of the Kurdish liberation movement. For a long time the answer to the "Kurdish Problem" was assumed to be a Kurdish state. But through the new paradigm, the problem itself becomes the solution – statelessness is the answer to how to build a truly liberated political system.

Permaculture also teaches us to "use and value the margins and edges" and "use and value diversity." In the garden, this means using polyculture growing techniques, like the 'three sisters' planting pattern described above. It acknowledges that monoculture- just having one kind of plant – does not exist in nature, or is a symptom of a system out of balance. Furthermore, we can observe that the spaces between systems – the 'margins and edges' – are areas of high diversity and productivity. This includes spaces like tidal pools or riverbanks, where unique forms of life develop and flourish. These principles are relevant to political organising in lots of ways which are encompassed by democratic confederalism. Democratic modernity embraces diversity and plurality, rejecting the hegemonic and fascist tendencies of capitalist modernity and the state system. In politics, we embrace the edges through organising as and alongside marginalised communities. The Kurdish liberation movement also teaches us to not focus all of our energy on the centre of power – the state and corporations – but to also build power around the edges, in society and in the places where the state does not have a monopoly on power. This way you're able to grow revolution on fertile ground, with many voices feeding into the process and embracing the diversity that will give a revolutionary system sustainability.

A truly sustainable system is able to absorb and work with change, staying true to the values at the heart of the system while adjusting the methods. The permaculture principle that describes this approach is "apply self regulation and accept feedback." Simply put, this means don't take more than what you need, be aware of the impacts of your actions on the world around you, and continuously readjust your approach to ensure that you are aligned with the values at the core of your work. It doesn't take much effort to see how this applies to ecology and politics equally. This concept is encompassed by the Zapatista approach of "walking, we ask questions," which encapsulates how revolution is an ongoing process that requires constant reflection, questioning and readjusting our path. Tekmil, the Kurdish liberation movement's practice of critic and self-critic, is also crucial in this process. Through giving criticism and evaluating our work, we ensure that we stay on track, and are being as effective as possible. Examples of this include recent actions of the Autonomous Administration in adjusting the role of Tev Dem to support the neighbourhood communes to work in a genuinely democratic way, as well as changes from the Economy committee to strengthen the collective nature of cooperatives, rather than acting too much like private initiatives.

By dismantling the boundary between the political and ecological realms, we can strengthen our ability to build movements that are resilient, dynamic and effective. Democratic confederalism and the Kurdish liberation movement have a natural affinity to ecological thinking, so it's no surprise that the new paradigm places ecological sustainability as one of the three core pillars of a revolutionary approach. As the ecological values at the heart of the revolution are applied to the reality in North East Syria, permaculture can be a useful tool to frame the environmental approach. Conversely, Western political movements struggle to meaningfully integrate sustainability into broader political movements, and ecological campaigns often take a highly technical and state-centred approach. Through weaving a permaculture approach into our political organising, we can develop a more holistic and coherent politics. We can nurture a revolution that is built on mutuality and diversity, that enables us to live freely with each other and with nature.

For more information on permaculture, check out:
http://www.labofii.net/docs/13attitudes.pdf
https://permaculturepprinciples.com/

6 Ecological Catastrophe: Nature Talks Back

By Pelşîn Tolhildan

Would a human being set fire to their own house? Yes, they would! Would a human cut the branch of a tree they sit on? Yes, indeed! Would humanity, as often repeated in Yasar Kemal's novel "Ince Memed", pull a knife on the table they eat on? Oh yes! Would a human being grow up to call the mother womb that gave birth to them "savage"? Definitely! Until that fire comes to surround them, until that branch falls on their head, until that knife touches their bone, until that nest completely closes to them so that they are left breathless, human beings would, have done, and unfortunately still continue to do all of the aforementioned things. Of course not all of a sudden, but ever since they became victims of human-made mentalities and systems. Now we can call it the "ecology issue" or we can call it nature teaching us a lesson, in any case we are paying the price for our betrayal of nature.

Every phenomenon whose value we do not appreciate makes us pay the price. The bigger the value whose value we do not recognize, the bigger the price we pay for betraying it. If it is our own nature whose value we do not appreciate, the nature into which we are born, this price will turn into global warming and burn us, it will become a forest fire and roast us, it will become a flood and drown us, it will turn into ice and freeze us, it will become contamination and poison us. And for every day that we ignore nature's calls to solve the problem, death will hits us even harder. But has it always been the case that we did not recognize the importance of nature? Is this how we developed? How could we become the enemies and killers of the oceans, forests, lands, and air that have given birth to us? And how could the same nature, which is our birth nest, turn into fire raining down on us, into flood, and into poison that throws up on us? Life is still in nature's hands, just like death. But when and why did nature start proving to its own children, who kill life, its own ability to kill? Does nature have a mind that makes fun of our mind which considers itself as the supreme one among "God's highest creations"? Our soul creates disasters when being hurt and it is a part that comes from this nature – so perhaps, when we hurt this nature's soul, it takes revenge by destroying! But why? And how? These are now questions that no human who lives on this world can escape from any longer. Understanding where, when and how this harm and the resulting process of having to pay the price for it, have begun, must be the responsibility of every human who wants to live in freedom. So in order to understand the issue, let's start at the roots. Let us have a look at what kind of mentality we have lost and how it related to nature:

"Natural society's mentality world relies on an animated understanding of nature. It believes that every phenomenon in nature has a spirit. Spirits are

understood as features that secure aliveness. In the totemic religions the concept of an external, ruling deity apart from the self is not yet developed. Great effort is made to be in harmony with nature's spirits. Failure to do so is similar to death. When this is the fundamental perspective on nature, an extraordinary need for harmony emerges. According to the most fundamental principle of ecology, we are face to face with life. Effort is made to avoid societal life from going against the natural forces. When constructing religions and ethics, the most fundamental principle is harmony with the environment and the natural forces. This principle is so deeply rooted in the mentality that it is valued as a religious and moral tradition. In fact, this is the principle of life's natural flow manifesting itself in the human society. There is no being that does not consider its environment. Short-term deviations are overcome in a stream within external and internal conditions; otherwise, by being completely left out of the system, they cease their existence. The importance of the principle of ecology for human society derives from this fundamental feature of nature.

In natural society, all members of the sociality organically participate in the entirety of life. Everyone is a genuine, essential part of society. Belief and perceptions are common. The concepts of lying and cheating have not yet developed. It is as though they speak the same childish language with nature. To dominate nature, to abuse it is the biggest sin, taboo, and evil against their ethics and beliefs, their newly developed societal rules. What was turned upside down in the slave-holding statist society is this religious and ethical fundamental principle.

However, humanity increasingly lost touch with this ethical understanding:

the rise of the slaveholding statist society constitutes a fundamental break with this vital principle. The development of the environmental, ecological question along with this particular direction that society has taken is thus fundamentally linked to the beginning of civilization. The civilization of classed society is a society at conflict with nature. The main reason for this phenomenal question has to do with the counter-revolutionary slaveholding mentality paradigm of this new society.

Indeed, the break from natural society and the transition to the slave mentality-paradigm have come at a heavy price. Once the world's ties were loosened and removed, the bonds between nature and social life transformed from a harmonic, mutually nourishing relationship to a subject-object relation. The image of a mother-woman, who feeds a child with one breast and an animal cub with the other breast has become laughable, even imaginary in our eyes today. In the western enlightenment tradition, we started to say: "There is no difference between the cries of an animal or the grinding of the machine when experimenting". The same mentality reached horrific dimensions in the hands of the church in the tortures of witches, the wise women. They too, became objects of limitless science. "The most realistic way of looking for the roots of the increasingly deepening ecological crisis,

which develops parallel to the crisis of the social system, is to consider the beginning of civilization. The more alienation within society happens due to domination within society, the more the alienation from nature is realized." (2) The human has become cruel towards nature by oppressing its own species:

"Especially the scientific method developed by Francis Bacon constituted an attempt to enforce an order that would have a rationalistic and scientific effect on nature. Similar to the determination of the movement of planets, this scientific method required the extraction of nature from its spirit in order to implement rationalistic methodological processes. Carolyn Merchant, in her book 'The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution' claims that it was in this age when nature was identified with woman and that along with Machiavelli, scientists like Bacon started expressing their desire to oppress 'irrational' (woman-like) nature. In fact, Bacon used the analogy of the interrogation of witches to argue for the scientific methodology of the extraction of 'truth' from nature. He wrote: 'In order to observe nature's adventures, there is no other way than to force it into a corner. That is the only way to rule it. According to Merchant, 'nature is seen as a woman who takes orders from man and operates under his authority'" (3).

The result of this struggle in the name of conquering irrationality under the banner of reason was complete irrationality in turn. It is out of discussion that in the name of "obtaining the truth", truth itself was betrayed. After our mentality broke away from natural society's mentality, the name of the societal system changed but its mentality did not. It is a mentality that breaks from natural society, betrays itself and nature, and every day cuts the branch of the tree it sits on. It does not matter whether we call this mentality formation dominant, statist, slaveholding, feudal or capitalist. All of these together constitute a break from natural society and nature. They make up the opposite pole to natural society, in other words, they are anti-nature. They are anti-life, anti-human. Thus they are anti-ecological. If sociality and nature managed to live together for thousands of years in harmony, it means that the human, in fact the human of natural society, proved this reality: the human is not the opposite of the same nature it came from, on the contrary, it is nature's very own child. And thus, they can live together without eradicating each other. Thus, contrary to the long imposition of Western mentality, neither is nature savage, nor do humans need to survive by fighting against and conquering this "savagery". This is a philosophical lie which tries to break the truth into subject-object dichotomies, incites conflict, and aims to perpetuate the hegemonic system as eternal. It is a story of a conscious struggle by hegemonic systems to alienate humans and nature from each other. This story of alienation has attained an irreversible structure under capitalism. Everybody was turned into a subject of this massacre on nature in the name of bravery, in the name of achieving victory in the war against the "wild". Now it is the turn of this story's "object" to speak. Now, it is talking. And every day, it gives us the message that we need to take it seriously. Whether we see it or not, now the world belongs to nature.

This world cries that it no longer wants to be the object of this story:

if we take a look at internet searches related to thousands of recent news items on the "environment" or "ecology", while keeping in mind that such searches can only scratch the surface of the real extent of our earth's ecological disaster, it is easy to hear this outcry. Dams and other infrastructures that swallow natural beauties, nuclear plants, fossil fuel energy sources, forest fires due to wars or climate change, petrol contamination of water and soil, chemical waste dumping, deforestation, intoxication of soil, water and air due to gold cyanidation, the global food crisis and the development of GMOs, the dangerous disposal of medication, lack of access to clean drinking water, greenhouse gases related to industrial agriculture, extinction of species, mined territories, earthquakes, activated volcanoes, tsunamis, the emergence of illnesses, the disappearance of natural environments in favour of cities and factories, acid rain... and perhaps many other phenomena we may not even be aware of and which have caused ecological disasters by human hand. Extending this list not only depresses us, but the multiple dimensions of the problem are also illustrative of nature's mysterious self-defence power.

Nature has an evolutionary character that has been in action for millions of years. This is not about the fittest exterminating the less fit. Perhaps it is true that the less fit decrease in numbers. However, the smallest organisms to the great ecosystems in nature arrange, adapt and change themselves according to changing conditions. In other words, nature resists. It creates its own mechanisms to defend itself. Or the human-caused issues upset nature's balance and result in catastrophes that bring about great changes. While humans tried to conquer and dominate nature and to engage in a competition to show nature who is the master, they forgot a fairly simple phenomenon. Nature was their home, their birth nest, it was the life atmosphere to which humans owe their bread, water, their very existence and happiness. "The fundamental reason for ecological problems is the ruling power rendering an anti-natural life possible through its tyranny and lies. By denying nature's role in life and by replacing it with fake deities and creators, it is possible to call nature 'blind force'". (4) But the eyes and hearts that were so focused on profit ambitions remained oblivious to this naked reality. While the belief was held that nature has been made mute after all these attacks, the one who was forced on their knees was the human in the end. In a way, nature has managed to express itself in many ways, while it is humans who swallow their tongue. In order to see the ways in which we pay the price for destroying the right to live of the same nature we owe our life to, let us have a brief look at some natural disaster news at the time when this article was first written (2009-2010):

Experts claim that the flood in Pakistan and the extreme heat in Russia are linked to the extraordinary impacts of global warming. Due to flood and landslides, more than 700 people in China, more than 1,600 people in Pakistan, more than 130 people in India have been killed. Thousands of

people disappeared. Millions of people lost their homes. In the smog and dust that covers Moscow and which resulted in drought, toxic material has been discovered. In the fires that have started in more than 600 different areas, 50 people in Russia have been killed. The fires started to affect the military areas so that the explosive materials in these regions were carried to other areas by the authorities. In Chile, 1.5 million homes were destroyed, the number of disappeared people rose to 300. Chile's president Bachelet claimed that he could not find the words to describe the 8.8 level earthquake and the catastrophe it caused. In a country with a population of 16 million, at least 2 million were affected by the earthquake. Rescue attempts continue in Italy's north, where an earthquake took the lives of 250 people. In the earthquake, 15,000 buildings were rendered inoperable. It has been reported that the bush fires that have been continuing in the south of Australia for days have been caused by arson. Fires continue still in 20 different places. The number of deaths might increase to 230. Global warming is melting the glaciers of Mount Kilimanjaro, which is considered world heritage. The forest fires in Greece cannot be brought under control. The fire that started near Athens is approaching the city centre. Due to the increasing fire, strengthened by the wind, a state of emergency has been declared.

Things have only worsened ever since. More recently, a scientific report by the WWF revealed that 60% of animal populations have been wiped out by humanity since 1970 with disastrous effects on nature and its human children. It seems that ecological catastrophe has advanced to such a degree that it would take up to 7 million years for nature to recover even if destruction would be halted now. Entire species are predicted to die out, countless hurricanes, droughts, floods, wildfires and glaciers melting are anticipated. Experts speak of a "climate genocide". The most affected humans of these developments are in the Global South, in particular indigenous and rural communities, whose relationship to nature is symbiotic and organic. The ecological crisis is also caused by global arms trade and likewise wars are often triggered by changes in the climate, due to unsustainable capitalist interests in natural resources. Yet, states and companies, the main culprits of ecological catastrophe consciously withdraw from legal and international responsibilities and resort to means of denying the obvious, disastrously approaching death of life. As if to summon the end of the world, they announce further destruction of natural habitats, and the exploitation of life. And there are more news items about bigger and smaller ecological disasters and catastrophes that are not included here.

Is it possible that humans call human-made catastrophes "natural disasters", in order to cover up their own guilt? Or perhaps, by calling these disasters "God's plan", they try to find a divine partner in crime? In reality, no disaster is able to grow this much and claim so many lives, without the impact of humans. Indeed, human-made industry, technology, wars, weapons (chemical, biological or any other kind of weaponry), overpopulation and many other developments or inventions burn nature, and nature burns back. The more it gets destroyed at the hands of humans, it destroys back. The more it gets

massacred by humans, it brings death to humanity.

These are neither expressions of a pessimistic point of view, nor do they reflect the propaganda of a science fiction hero that is looking for a piece of land to start a new social life with the seeds in their hands after all the lands have been eradicated. Maybe these catastrophes have not impacted all of us individually yet. Perhaps we have not yet seen hundreds of people die at once in front of our eyes. But everybody who lives on this planet needs to know that the human-made catastrophes are as close to us as our breath, water and bread, even as the blood running in our veins. As always, we are under nature's siege. But this nature is no longer the natural nature of thousands of years ago. This nature is a nature whose nature has been manipulated. That is why its siege is unlike its mother nest. We are in the siege of a nature that has been hurt, divided, defiled, poisoned, harmed and made to bleed. Of course, in cases when nature seemed defenceless against humans, there have been times where it brought disasters in turn. But what was the difference? The nature of that nature had not yet been played with. Through certain observations, humans were able to more or less identify and estimate the location, time, extent of such disasters and act accordingly. But nowadays we are not even aware of how we exactly harm nature as humans. Who knows how many nuclear tests there are? How much have our seas, our lands been contaminated by petrol or toxic material? We don't know exactly the amount of greenhouse gases and carbon contamination. Who would know the biodiversity and ecosystems that were eliminated by the soldier hands that also burned down the forests of Kurdistan? In short, there is an uncontrollable attack on nature by humans. That is why perhaps nature will strike back with a horrible surprise through a series of uncontrollable disasters that we cannot anticipate. Our aim is neither to demonize humans, nor to advocate for a protection of nature that is separate from the human and society. We merely discuss a factual reality that was designed by human hand, mind and action, perhaps by lacking the knowledge over the importance of time.

At the beginning of this writing, we mentioned the development of the ecological issue with the rise of the slaveholding system. But those concerned with ecological problems are aware that the system that has deepened and further led these issues to unsustainability is capitalism. "Europe's individualism has come to embody the massacre of the society and its ecology. The capitalist system's establishment of its dominance, its move from individuality to individualism, not only reversed social gains, but also caused the biggest ecological deviation in history" (5).

Ecological issues and their sources have been discussed through a variety of philosophical, societal, eco-feminist and many other perspectives and have thus become visible as a serious problem for years now. Perhaps the real problem then is how much this problem is being felt. This concerns the real powers of the society. Because when the real forces that make up society start to sense this problem, a large part of the solution will have been achieved.

Because "The actual ecological phenomenon is to prevent the relationship between nature and society becoming a gap. If this gap is not closed as soon as possible, the society will turn into dinosaurs"(6). When we look at the issue from this perspective, we can make a global effort to sense the problem and bring it to the agenda.

The World Social Forum's slogan "Another World is Possible", the UN's climate conferences, locally organized free ecological forums, social urban movements, the agreement of big countries on issues like reducing carbon intensity, countries' discussions on bio-security, the creation of ecological collectives, hundreds of thousands of activists around the world risking their lives to draw attention to ecological issues, the discussions of eco-socialists and eco-feminists, the organization of ecology festivals, UNESCO compiling a list on endangered world heritage, sustainable energy conferences, the slogan "The dead don't wear gold" of those whose soil has been contaminated, and thousands of actions, events, organizations, work, increasing awareness and activism are all signs of an effort to close this gap between nature and society. However, when considering the size of the catastrophe we are facing, these initiatives remain dispersed and insufficient. Let us look at the call made by an ecology site: "The ecological crisis is not a coincidental feature of capitalism. It is in the DNA of the system. It is not possible to resolve through reforms this incessant hunger, the desire to multiply profits perpetually. The only thing that capitalists can think of when considering the ecological crisis is how much more profit they can make out of it. Therefore, the struggle against the ecological crisis cannot succeed until the capitalist system is removed."

Indeed, the mentality of the solution is important. To create a common ecological mindset in the face of the capitalist, civilizationist mentality that created ecological destruction means to organize and mobilize all of these efforts and bring about a faster and more efficient intervention. Abdullah Öcalan's statement that "the revolution of the 21st century is ecological" not only stresses the extent of the solution, but also its importance, as well as the idea that the crisis is indeed resolvable when the solutions are implemented. This statement is also important to understand and expose the cleverness of market circles and their views that the global ecological crisis can be resolved within capitalism or through reforms. When we look at the effects of the problem on our lives, even if roughly, it is clear that a revolutionary viewpoint and practice is necessary. In order to see this, the problem must be approached in an ethical way. Because if our real standard in our attitude towards nature is the natural society, and if natural society is the stem cell of the ethical-political society; our perspective on the resolution of ecological issues must contain an ethical dimension: "It is not possible to defend the rationality, ethics of any societal system that does not unify with nature. The reason for the system being overcome in terms of rationality and morality is the fact that it is in the greatest conflict with nature. The relationship between the chaos experienced by the capitalist societal system and environmental catastrophe is dialectical. Only the exit from the system can

overcome the radical contradictions with nature. It is clear that environmental movements alone cannot overcome this contradictory character. On the other hand, an ecological society necessitates a moral transformation as well. The anti-ethical system of capitalism can only be overcome with an ecological attitude. The ethics-conscience relationship necessitates an empathetic and sympathetic spirituality. This in turn can only carry meaning with a competent ecological equipment. It is friendship with nature, it is the belief in natural religion. As such, it means to re-unite with the natural organic society with a new and awakened consciousness. A societal consciousness devoid of an ecological consciousness cannot help but dissolve and corrupt, as seen in the case of real socialism. Ecological consciousness is fundamentally an ideological consciousness. It is like the bridge between the borders between philosophy and ethics. Only if the politics that aim to save us from the contemporary crisis are ecological, it can lead us towards a right societal system" (7).

"No matter how small, there are the remains of natural society in everybody" (8). Perhaps this means to look at our inner mirror when looking for solutions. Only if everybody turns towards this inner mirror to examine one's own responsibilities, consciousness and actions, ecological problems, and nature's mysterious, extraordinary existence can be felt. With this in mind, we must not allow capitalism to propagate individualist solutions to what requires a global system change.

Resources

1 Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, Bir Halkı Savunmak, Devletçi Toplum –Köle Toplumun Oluşumu,

2 Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş,

3 Josephine Donovan, 1985, Feminist Theory: The Intellectual Traditions

4 Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş,

5 Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumda Komünal ve Demokratik Değerlerin Tarihsel Özü, p.95

6 Demokratik ve Ekolojik Toplum İçin Bir Taslak (Proje) Düşüncesi,

7 Abdullah Öcalan, 2004, Bir Halkı Savunmak, Toplumsal Ekolojiye Dönüş,

8 Imralı prison island notes

7 Against Green Capitalism

By HÊLÎN ASÎ

This year the discussions and struggles for the climate have gained enormous attention and outreach. The importance and seriousness of the situation, although long known, has been emphasized in recent months by young people around the world. The "Fridays for Future" movements have grown into a notable and remarkably young global mass movement – with local actions in many European countries, Australia, China, India, Japan, Turkey, Rojava, South Korea, Thailand, South Africa, Uruguay, Argentina and Mexico. The weekly strikes are led and organised by young people. The goals are concrete: the fastest possible exit from coal, a complete switch to renewable energies, consistent taxation of greenhouse gas emissions and compliance with the relevant international agreements. Global warming should not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius. It is now clear to many that these are not unrealistic, utopian goals, but the only way out of the current situation.

"Rezo" effect

In the protests it is made clear that there will be no future worth living if things continue as they have done so far. With similar words, about 100 well-known "YouTubers" have launched a call to their subscribers shortly before the European elections on Sunday, in which they refer to the climate crisis and advise against electing parties that have no prospects in this respect, who stand idly by or even refuse to recognise the crisis. After the enormous success of the Greens in Germany, who were able to double their share of the vote in the European elections and thus overtook the SPD, the SPD even speaks of the "Rezo" effect – the Youtuber Rezo had previously published and launched the call. There is no doubt that the climate seems to be one of the most important issues for young people in Germany.

A part of society that should not be underestimated, however, continues to deny and trivialise climate change. The climate movements are bombarded with accusations, and ridicule. Especially the right-wing, conservative, but also economically liberal camps try to either deny climate change or trivialize its effects and present it as if the crisis could be solved within the framework of the current situation. The demands of the climate movements are deliberately distorted: it is often said in a scornful tone that the strikers want to go back to the Stone Age, that they would stop "progress" or simply want to skip school under the pretext of a strike. What is certain is that the climate activists must withstand all kinds of delegitimization. Thus, shortly after the election, CDU Chairwoman Kramp-Karrenbauer denied the Youtubers the legitimacy of their political positioning. And the political right is repeatedly told that there are hidden power interests behind the climate movement, and that activists like Greta Thunberg are only puppets in a power game.

Failure of Western civilization

It is no wonder that people develop such a vivid imagination when it comes to looking facts in the eye, especially when reality is so at odds with one's own lifestyle, one's own political positions and one's current value and economic system. The climate crisis ultimately reveals the failure of the supposed economic and technological "progress" of Western civilization, praised by both liberals and rightists. Here I would like to quote the revolutionary, anti-colonialist thinker Frantz Fanon, who said 60 years ago: "For centuries Europe has stopped progress in other people and subjugated them for its own purposes and glory; for centuries it has suffocated almost all humanity in the name of its supposed 'spiritual adventure'. See how today it oscillates between atomic and spiritual dissolution."

The majority are now aware that the neo-liberal system, which is committed to freedom and progress, has now failed at the last. What the exploitation of women workers, worldwide hunger and ever-increasing poverty have shown for decades finds its last proof in the climate crisis. Capitalism has not only uprooted and alienated mankind from (its own) nature, but has also attacked and dismembered nature to such an extent that all living beings are deprived of their livelihood. The climate crisis is not a natural development, nor is it, as some claim, the result of overpopulation.

The climate crisis is the result of unlimited production, unlimited market freedom and consumer orientation. It is a question of economic and energy policy, and therefore of the system in which we live. All statistics suggest that climate change is man-made and that greenhouse gas emissions are particularly caused by the excessive use of fossil fuels in the mass production of goods in neo-liberalism.

Not aligning the struggle to the given circumstances

It is questionable whether the success of the Greens in the European elections will change anything. Apart from the fact that the Greens did not take any significant steps in the Federal Government in the past, an outcome of the current ecological catastrophes cannot be aligned with the given economic conditions. An ecological struggle must be explicitly anti-capitalist and must not make compromises in the sense of capital.

The gain of green parties in Europe is therefore not necessarily a gain for the current struggle of the many young people who are working at grassroots level for the climate. On the contrary, the next few years will present the movement with even greater challenges: it must not rely on parliamentary politics and must consistently fight against "green capitalism".

The movements must not bow, and the only way to fight consistently is to develop a positive, socialist perspective for the future, a real alternative for which it is worth fighting. The demands and goals should therefore never be

formulated only negatively, but should also contain concrete positive aspects for a liveable, beautiful future for all. Those who cannot present an alternative will see no light at the end of the tunnel and will lose themselves in recurring aberrations.

Potential for a common movement

Creating an alternative that brings together and involves all parts of society can overcome an incredible number of barriers. The example of self-governing structures in Rojava/Northern Syria shows the strength of political self-govemment. People are taken seriously as political subjects and have their say on matters that concern them. Such a form of grassroots work and organization is needed so that divisions within society can be loosened. A strongly polarizing language is used, especially when it comes to the climate, where "others" are quickly accused and condemned. But through this reproach the rejection can even strengthen itself, because it does not try to win people for itself. Only when people are picked up where they stand and perceived and taken seriously as political subjects in this struggle can a flourishing struggle emerge.

The fact that climate change affects and will affect everyone on this planet without exception can also be seen as an opportunity in this respect. The climate crisis has the potential to mobilise all possible movements for a common struggle. Whatever utopias we create, we will not be able to realise them in a broken and destroyed world. The young age of the activists* is also a great advantage. Pupils*, children, young people, students whose energies are otherwise exploited and whose rebellions are often punished and subjugated, are now organising themselves and are heard by the whole world. Within a few months, millions of people around the world have risen, even if it all started small.

Ecological struggle can only be internationalist

"System change not climate change" is what many Fridays For Future protests say. We should take this slogan at its word and organize a way of living together that is worth living for everyone in the world. The ecological struggle can only be internationalist, not only because regional changes are not enough, but also because we have to be aware that the extreme greenhouse gas emissions of the so-called industrialised countries affect above all economically poorer regions, which lack the means to protect themselves from the effects. The supposedly progressive Western civilisation is responsible not only for its own crisis, but also for the degradation of nature everywhere. At the end of history, capitalism shot itself in the leg, and it is now up to young people all over the world to shake the already broken system for good.

The New Paradigm: Weaving ecology, democracy and gender liberation into a revolutionary political paradigm

Viyan Querecox

This article is a transcription of a talk – given by a former CFGN staff member in Rojava – recorded in Rojava for the Green Earth Awakening and the DSEI anti-arms trade mobilisation, which both took place in England last month. The aim of the talk was to highlight the role of ecology in the Rojava revolution, and share lessons that can help build the movement in the UK.

I'm sending this message from the liberated territory of the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria, more commonly known as Rojava. I came here over half a year ago to join the work of the revolution and to learn from it. I've been doing ecological works – some tree planting and garden design, as well as working with the women's movement, learning Kurdish and teaching English. Before I came here, I organised with radical groups in the UK for over a decade, including ecological campaigns, feminist and queer groups, the anti-fascist movement and more recently taking a more community organising and radical democracy approach. One of the main reasons I came to Rojava was because I felt that although there is a lot of amazing organising in the UK, we've also come up against a brick wall in some ways, and we have a lot of questions that we're trying to answer in terms of what kind of world we're trying to build, and how we get there. And when I started to learn more about the revolution in Rojava, I really started to feel that this was a movement that we could learn a lot from, that has over a few decades built up something powerful enough to take on the forces of fascism, patriarchy and capitalism, and to establish a society based on ecological sustainability, gender liberation and radical democracy. So in this talk I'll try to speak a bit about the things that –from the perspective of being here – are the most lacking in the UK radical left movement.

At the root of what we are lacking in the UK, what is stopping us from being able to develop a truly revolutionary perspective, is our inability so far to commit to a new political paradigm which lays the foundation for a different kind of society. Instead, we tend to just react against the most recent outrages that the dominant system throws at us – whether that's fracking, Brexit or Boris Johnson.This talk is being recorded both for the DSEI anti-arms mobilisation, as well as for the Green Earth Awakening, and at first I thought it would be really impossible to record something that was suitable for two such different political spaces. But the more I thought about what I wanted to say, what learnings I'm trying to bring from being part of the

revolution here, I realised that what was missing in the UK is this common foundation of a new political paradigm, and that's something that we need to build across all the different tendencies and areas of focus within our broader movement. So although I could talk about how the Turkish state uses both F-15 fighter jets and environmentally destructive dam construction to wage war on the revolution, and I could talk about the ecological projects here –the tree nursery cooperatives, the reforestation of the region, the education systems – I don't think that is what the environmental movement in the UK really needs to hear in order to develop. This awareness and this analysis isn't what we're missing in the UK –we're missing something a lot more fundamental.

In order for the ecological movement – for all radical movements in the UK – to transition from being a movement of protest to a movement of wholesale social transformation, we need a conceptual framework that ties our actions together and gives us a clear direction to work towards. We need to move beyond being anti-fascist, anti-fracking, anti-Boris, anti-capitalist and so on, to being for something that ties together all of our fragmented movements and gives us a common horizon to work towards. One of the biggest threats we are facing as humanity is climate change, and in order to rise to the challenge of organising against a political and economic system whose ideology and philosophy fuels climate change, we need an ideology and philosophy that coherently links together climate change with other forms of oppression. The work of Abdullah Öcalan as well as the philosophy of social ecology have made this link through understanding the relationship between humans and nature as being a facet of the relationships of domination between human and human, and especially the relationship of domination of men over women – what we call patriarchy. This understanding is a basis, a foundation, of the Kurdish freedom movement's "New Paradigm", which was developed in response to the shortcomings and contradictions of a more traditional state-based socialist approach.

The New Paradigm is critical of the institution of the state, seeing it as a mechanism of domination, and instead bases itself on the pillars of ecological sustainability, women's liberation and grassroots democracy. The New paradigm is more than just an ideology or a strategy, it's a whole way of thinking, of observing, experiencing and analysing, of conceptualising truth. So here we see a bit of a mismatch between what the movement here is proposing as a counter to climate change, versus what our movements in the UK have been able to propose. In the UK, when we talk about fighting climate change, we talk about technology, we talk about legislation and carbon taxes, we talk about rejecting growth based economics and sometimes about capitalism. Slowly more segments of the movement are starting to listen to the voices of communities of colour and indigenous people and saying we need to talk about colonialism, about racism – which is a step in the right direction. In the Kurdish freedom movement, when they talk about ecology, they talk about how we understand truth, they talk about where we came from as humanity, they talk about the knowledge of mothers and

grandmothers, of elders. So this isn't really a talk about ecology in Rojava, this is about the New Paradigm of the Kurdish freedom movement and how it manifests in Rojava and in ecological approaches of the movement, because you can't really separate it out. The political paradigm of the movement drives the work here, and the insistence that environmental sustainability is intrinsically tied to gender liberation and bottom up democracy builds a framework of analysis that is a counter-proposal to the paradigm of capitalist modernity, rather than just a rejection of it.

Because the idea of a whole political paradigm is so huge, I find it useful to break it down a little bit into a few different facets. One of the ways I've been looking at it is through three aspects: political culture, ideology, and the democratic system.

So first let's look at the political principles and culture, which for me was one of the most important things to understand. Coming from the so called "west", we tend to look at technical, structural solutions to oppression. In terms of ecology, this means trying to change laws, pass international agreements, make renewable technology more available or ban plastic bags, fossil fuels or high-polluting industries. In wider political organising, even in radical groups, more technical, superficial solutions include building political structures that are more representative, or developing economic systems which are geared towards justice. And before coming here, I would never have called these things technical and superficial, I would have thought of them as structural and getting to the root of the problem. But one thing I have learned here is that we need to go deeper, and my understanding of what "deep" means is still changing.

So to an extent I came to Rojava looking for these technical solutions –how do the councils work? How often are elections? How many people make up a neighbourhood commune? But all of this is completely meaningless without a revolutionary political culture. This political culture has its foundation in trust- in ourselves, in each other, in the ideas of the movement. It's based on commitment and dedication, willingness to give yourself fully – and not grudgingly – to the work that is necessary. To put energy into developing and changing yourself and the people you are organising alongside, rather than rejecting someone if they do something wrong or you don't see eye to eye. It also means giving priority to the collective over the individual, reframing your idea of freedom so that it is less based on individual autonomy and more based on collective liberation. So things like call-out culture don't really exist here. Instead, there is a constant culture of giving criticism with love and respect, because we are committed to helping our friends improve and progress. This political culture and revolutionary values are the soul of the movement. Trying to build democratic confederalism – and environmental sustainability – without a foundation of this political culture is impossible.
The second facet is the ideology of the movement. This is as important, or at least almost as important, because it gives a framework and a destination to our political principles. It's through ideology that we analyse the state as a

relationship of domination, that we see capitalism as a temporary phase of human history which we can overcome, that in order to fight patriarchy we need to transfer power to women and other oppressed genders, and so on. I was always really repelled by ideology when I was organising in England, but I feel like I've really connected with the importance of ideology through my time here. Something that is taught here is that your analysis will be wrong if you are working through the wrong analytical lens. And if you fail to construct an alternative analytical lens to the dominant ones – which in the UK are liberalism, capitalism, state-mentality and so on – then you will end up working within the dominant analytical lens. And it's ideology that makes it possible to build this analytical lens. The movement here often explains that shortcomings of Western anarchism and Western feminism in this way – these movements were incredibly powerful, and achieved some great things, but were not able to breakout of the framework of liberalism and therefore got stuck in an individualist, capitalist and state-based way of thinking.

Having some kind of ideology that ties us together allows us to hold the contradictions within our strategy and actions, which is absolutely crucial in terms of fighting climate change. We work in a reality in which it's impossible to fully embody our ecological values in the way that we live, and getting overly fixated on this more lifestylist approach to sustainability cuts off a lot of possibilities to organise on a more collective and fundamental level. In Rojava, the ecological aspect of the revolution has faced countless challenges and is riddled with contradictions. Even though the movement is committed to sustainability, much of it runs off the profits of fossil fuel extraction, the lack of infrastructure means that people burn trash and dump waste, and the embargo means that more sustainable technology is incredibly hard to access. Sometimes decisions need to be made in which a more ecological approach comes into contradiction with a more practical shorter term approach. However, there is still a principled commitment to ecology which manifests both on a structural level – for example each municipality and region has an ecology committee – but also on the level of ethics, of principles. It seems to me that the lack of this common ideological framework in the UK has meant that we are less able to hold contradictions, so we get really wrapped up in technical debates about plastic straws, or whether to eat vegetarian, local or organic. Although these conversations can be useful, they can stop us from organising more effectively across all of society and building bridges with other radical movements; we develop approaches which can be purist and dogmatic. It means we get stuck in a loop of reactionary politics – reacting against power stations and runways,and proposed legislation, or specific politicians – letting these things completely shape our political strategy rather than working proactively to develop a new political paradigm and responding to threats from within that paradigm.

Finally, there are the structures and processes through which the movement here organises. These structures of grassroots democracy and federation build the system of democratic confederalism. This is the more technical element of how the political paradigm manifests in Rojava, and is certainly not a

blueprint that can be transplanted from one country to another. In England we will need to come up with our own system of democratic governance, which is shaped by our historical, cultural, social, economic context. Here society is organised into democratic units, the smallest of which is the neighbourhood commune. These units federate into district, regional levels and so on, up to the level of the Autonomous Administration of North East Syria. As much power as possible is devolved downwards, so only decisions that have a broader impact are discussed on the wider levels. The system is still very much developing, and in fact not many people thoroughly understand how it works. But – at this point at least – it's being held together by the political culture and values, and the strength of the movement's commitment to finding solutions, addressing mistakes, and putting huge amounts of work into keeping everything working. And this commitment is at least partly due to the powerful ideology that drives the work and presents a powerful, compelling vision that we are all working towards together.

So of course it's not about these three things – political principles, ideology and democratic system – separate from each other. It's the relationship between them, the tensions and contradictions between them. You can't have the organisational structures of the movement separate from the culture and from the ideology. For some people with an ecological background it might be useful to think of this as a permaculture approach – how we see things as a whole and give meaning to the relationships between different elements rather than breaking them down into binaries good or bad, right or wrong, true or false. At the same time as being an ecological approach – because this is how nature works, holistically, rather than through binaries– it is also what would seen here as an anti-patriarchal approach. And I want to talk a bit more about how the movement connects anti-patriarchy with ecological sustainability – as well as anti-fascism, anti-racism, pro-democracy etc – because for me this is something that we can really draw on in our organising. And I see a lot of groups in the UK working on developing this analysis and narrative – from the Wretched of the Earth collective, to the Power beyond Borders camp this summer, to the fact that there is an environmentally focused day at the DSEI mobilisation. So for me, it's about taking that next step and not just linking struggles and making connections, but developing a political paradigm that makes it completely non-negotiable that ecological sustainability, gender liberation, radical democracy, anti-imperialism, anti-racism and anti-fascism are woven together into a movement that presents an alternative to the capitalist paradigm and is powerful enough to take on its power structures.

I've been talking a lot so far on a fairly abstract level, and I'd like to bring some of this to life a bit more. In order to explore what it looks like to build this kind of paradigm shift, I'd like to talk a bit about how women's liberation ties in with ecology and the development of a new kind of society, a new kind of politics. One of the ways women's liberation is being worked for in Rojava is through the development of something called Jineoloji – the

science of women. Jineoloji is not a campaign or an ideology, it's being developed as a science, as a methodology, to create a paradigm of analysis and truth which is holistic, rather than breaking everything down into things you can prove, things you can't prove – things which are real and things which are not real. The reason that this is coming from the women's movement is because patriarchy is seen as being tied to a way of thinking which is about binaries, domination, and fragmentation – to the philosophical approach of positivism. Women are seen as being able to hold up a different way of thinking which patriarchy has been trying to suppress for thousands of years, but which has been kept alive all this time through the resistance to patriarchy by women and all oppressed genders. So here again we see the counter-proposal to the patriarchal paradigm, not just a rejection of it. And we can connect it with ecology because the domination of nature by humans goes together with the domination of women by men. And so the leadership of the women of the movement is part of the ecological pillar of the revolution, as well as being part of the democratic pillar.

The revolution in Rojava is a women's revolution. This doesn't just mean that women fought in the armed forces, but that women are taking leadership positions on every level of the revolutionary work. This includes women of all classes, ethnicities, ages. Mothers are seen as playing a key role in the revolution, and they are often the most radical and bad-ass in terms of their dedication, their vision, and their passion. These women don't just happen to be taking leadership position – the leadership of women is a non-negotiable in the political structures here. All institutions – whether they are community assemblies and local government, cultural institutions, educational academies or political parties – are governed through a "co-chair" or "co-president" system, in which one of the chairs or presidents needs to be a woman. In the context of political representation, this means that a political group that is trying to participate in the democratic system but does not represent women would only ever have one representative in the council, while all the other groups have two. All institutions also have a parallel autonomous women's structure which exists on the same level of power as the general, mixed structure. This is the case from the smallest level – for example a union of teachers in a small town – to the autonomous women's structure for the whole of Rojava – Kongreya Star.

One example of the link between ecology and women's organising is Jinwar, a village set up by the women's movement in Rojava. Jinwar houses around 15 women – and their children – who have come together to live collectively and ecologically. The women – who come from different backgrounds, regions, ages and ethnicities – farm several acres of crops, care for animals, run a bakery and collectively manage a shop. Some of their electricity is provided by solar panels, they use ecological farming methods, they are planting trees on their land and they study and share knowledge about natural healthcare. Jinwar brings together the three pillars of the New paradigm of the movement: democracy, ecology and women's liberation. Other projects –such as women's cooperatives, agricultural projects, academies and community work do this as

well, in different ways. All over North-East Syria, the new paradigm is slowly, gradually, taking hold. It's not easy – it will take lifetimes for the the paradigm to fully take root – but it speaks to something in people: our love of freedom, our connection to the natural world, our belief that things can be better.

So how do we do work towards this in the UK? We need to feel ambitious and hopeful. It's really hard to do that while being completely immersed in the reality of life in the UK. Being in Rojava has given me a new sense of perspective, the strength to think big and have political clarity, an ability to think beyond reactionary politics, and the ambition to work towards global democratic confederalism. I would encourage all of you to consider coming to Rojava to join and learning from the revolution here. Through doing this it is possible to experience a new paradigm and open your minds to new ways of organising. It's impossible to describe how it feels to be part of a movement which truly sees capitalism and patriarchy as just a relatively short phase of human history that can be overcome; a movement which is full of people – with all of their imperfections, and mistakes, and struggles – who are giving their lives to building this revolution, day after day.

Last month the Zapatistas announced a massive expansion of their territory in Chiapas with the words – "we learned that any dream that doesn't encompass the world is too small a dream." Even from all the way over here, I can see the glimmers of that dream in the UK, and I know that if we're willing to put in the work, we can give it shape. We cannot just limit ourselves to thinking about a single issue, a single area, a single political perspective. We can and must think bigger than that.

I wish you Serkeftin – success- in this work, and look forward to joining you when I return to the UK.